



A BOR- ROWED SISTER

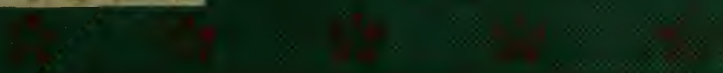
B

EL
OF
WH

Illustrated by

KATH

THE



PROPERTY OF
DIST. 56, MURRAY CO.

Property of Dist. [#] 56

Murray Co.

Library No. ~~138~~
138

~~No. 40~~

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 503
LAKE WILSON, MINN.

Ivan Reese

**PROPERTY OF
DIST. 56, MURRAY CO.**

No. 168 .

By Eliza Orne White

NOVELS

THE FIRST STEP.
THE WARES OF EDGEFIELD.
JOHN FORSYTH'S AUNTS.
LESLEY CHILTON.
WINTERBOROUGH.
THE COMING OF THEODORA.
MISS BROOKS.
A LOVER OF TRUTH.
A BROWNING COURTSHIP, AND OTHER STORIES.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

THE ENCHANTED MOUNTAIN.
BROTHERS IN FUR.
A BORROWED SISTER.
AN ONLY CHILD.
WHEN MOLLY WAS SIX.
A LITTLE GIRL OF LONG AGO.
EDNAH AND HER BROTHERS.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

CONTENTS

I. JESSIE COMES	1
II. THE WITCH KITTEN	11
III. BRIERFIELD	20
IV. BARBARA FRIETCHIE	31
V. A SUMMER EXCHANGE	43
VI. THE STORM AT HOLLISFORD	55
VII. THE VEGETABLE TEA-PARTY	65
VIII. THE TREE THAT GREW IN THE PAGES' GARDEN	75
IX. MRS. DRAPER'S DARNING-CLASS	84
X. A RED LETTER DAY	91
XI. GRANDMOTHER LOIS	103
XII. THE HOUSE WHERE NOTHING HAPPENED	111
XIII. THE TRIO CLUB	121
XIV. A WINTER PICNIC	129
XV. THE CHRISTMAS TREE	140

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LOIS AND ELLEN BRINGING HOME A GERANIUM FOR JESSIE (PAGE 8).	<i>Frontispiece</i>
"ANNE AND I HAVE A VEGETABLE GARDEN"	24
HER RUBBERS WERE BOATS	58
THE TRIO CLUB	128

A BORROWED SISTER

CHAPTER I

JESSIE COMES

LOIS PAGE, who had been an only child all her life, was to have a borrowed sister for the space of a year or more, and the prospect filled her with keen delight. If she had searched the wide world over she could not have found a more congenial sister than Jessie Matthews. Lois was equally fond of Ellen Morgan, and Ellen was a more stimulating friend, but Ellen had an uncertain temper, which would make living with her a torment, as well as a joy, while Jessie was as serene as a summer morning.

There was only one person who was not wholly satisfied with the arrangement, and this was Ellen. She sat on the edge of one of the beds in Lois's room, and criticised her arrangements in an aggravating way, while Lois was clearing out two drawers in her bureau.

"I should think you would rather have Jessie in

the spare room," said Ellen finally. "It is dreadful to have so little room for one's things."

Lois, with a pile of petticoats in her arms, looked up in surprise.

"Why, that's the joy of it all, Ellen. That's the best part. Always having somebody to talk to when you go to bed, and when you wake up in the morning. You've always had a sister, and so you don't understand how lonely it is to be all by yourself. It is the loveliest thing that ever happened to me," she added, with strong emphasis.

Ellen had borne as much as she could. "I think it is perfectly horrid," said she.

Lois was pulling open the lower drawer in the bureau and crowding in the petticoats. She looked up in bewildered surprise.

"I thought you loved Jessie," she said.

"I like her well enough," returned Ellen, who was in truth very fond of Jessie, "but I think it is perfectly horrid for you to have her living with you. You'll have such a good time every single minute that you won't care any more about me."

Lois came over and sat down on the edge of the bed and put her arms around Ellen. "Why, Ellen, you dear thing!" she exclaimed. Lois loved her friends so intensely that it never seemed possible

they could care equally for her, and this admission from the self-reliant Ellen, who was such a favorite, filled her with an amazed joy.

"I shall care just as much for you," Lois said. "It will be the same as it is with you and Anne. And there will be four of us to do things together."

"I shall expect to play with you every single day," said Ellen.

"Why, of course."

"And I don't want you to like Jessie any better than you like me; I couldn't stand that. I know she's ever so much nicer, and I don't see how you can help it."

"I love you both dearly," said Lois.

After this the atmosphere was cleared, and Ellen began to take an interest in the preparation of Lois's closet.

"Do you think she'll like the right-hand side or the left-hand side best?" asked Lois, who always needed a great deal of advice from her friends.

"The right-hand side is lots more convenient, because it is over next the shelves."

"But the left-hand side has that extra row of hooks across the end, and she has so many more dresses than I have."

Lois paused irresolutely, with a pink frock in one hand and a brown one in the other.

"I don't see how you ever get anything done, it takes you so long to decide," said Ellen impatiently.

"It does take me a good while," Lois admitted apologetically.

Her tone softened Ellen, and she helped Lois move her dresses, deciding that Jessie should have rather more than half of the right-hand side of the closet.

Lois and Ellen wanted to do all they could to make Jessie's arrival a cheerful one.

"I am going to the greenhouse to buy some flowers for Jessie," Ellen said. "She loves flowers. Won't you come with me?"

The two children went out into the world that was beginning to be made over new by a gentle April shower. Lois reflected, as she closed the door, that it was almost a year from the first time that she and Ellen had met. Lois remembered how lonely she had been because Daisy, her best friend, had gone away forever, and then almost as soon as the door closed to shut Daisy out, it opened to let Ellen in. Lois felt very thankful and happy, as they went along the village street. They stopped at Ellen's

house and unlocked a battered bank that she had owned for many years. She had refused to have Lois go shares with her in the matter of the flowers, and so Lois quietly dropped in a ten-cent piece through the slit in the top while Ellen was taking out two ten-cent pieces from the door at the back.

"Lois Page!" she protested. "I wanted it to be all my present."

"It is," said Lois. "But I guess I've a right to put my money in a savings' bank, if I like. It is a good safe bank."

Ellen had so little money that Lois could not bear to have her squander twenty cents so recklessly.

Ellen's formidable brothers were coming in at the gate as the two little girls were going out. In the winter, when Lois had stayed under the Morgans' hospitable roof, she had grown to be good friends with these boys, but now that she had not seen them for some time her old shyness returned.

"Hullo," said Amyas and Reuben.

"Hullo," said Lois in a faint voice. She dropped her eyes and did not look at them as she and Ellen passed through the gate.

When the children reached the greenhouse they were speechless at first in their admiration, for there was such a brilliant array of flowers.

“What are you going to get for Jessie?” Lois inquired.

“Pink roses,” said Ellen, who generally had her mind made up. She glanced at a jar full of them as she spoke. “How much are they a dozen?” she asked.

“Two dollars,” replied the black-haired girl behind the counter.

“Two dollars!” Ellen’s face fell. “Then six would be a dollar,” she added after a moment’s hesitation.

“Yes.”

“And for twenty cents” — the calculation was too intricate. Ellen looked up with a puzzled frown. “How many could I have for twenty cents?”

“One. They are twenty cents apiece.”

“Only one rose for twenty cents! And it would fade so soon!” said Ellen.

Lois had her nose buried in the roses. “Oh, Ellen, they are so lovely!” she exclaimed. “It seems as if just one rose was lovelier than a lot of anything else.”

But Ellen did not think so.

“You can get a whole plant for twenty cents,” said the girl, “and it could be set out in the garden later and last all summer.”

A whole living, growing plant for the same price as a single evanescent rose! How incredible that seemed! The children wandered around the greenhouse, looking first at one plant and then at another; even Ellen was for once undecided. There were fragrant hyacinths in bud and blossom, pink ones, white ones, and others of a beautiful shade of lilac, and lilac was Jessie's color; but the hyacinths, while perfect for the moment, would be out of blossom soon. Lois was attracted by a Marguerite, with its delicate white petals and yellow centre. It looked like Jessie, she said.

"It looks just like a common field daisy," objected Ellen, who was in an obstinate mood and preferred to choose her own plant. She went over to the other end of the greenhouse, where the geraniums were. They were stocky little plants; most of them were in blossom or in bud. There were pink geraniums and dark red ones, besides several of a brilliant scarlet. Lois looked at them irresolutely, but Ellen instantly set her affections on a scarlet geranium, with two gorgeous blossoms, as a concession to the present, as well as a bud of promise.

"I should like that one," she said.

"That is twenty-five cents."

"That is the one I want," repeated Ellen firmly,

"but I've only got twenty cents." It seemed to her that nothing else in life would satisfy her but this one geranium, with its full and perfect flowers.

"You can have any of these for twenty cents," said the girl, indicating an inferior group.

"This is a nice one; it has three buds," said Lois.

"It is all right for you who are going to live in the house with it, but I want it to look beautiful when I give it to her. I want that one," said Ellen, "and I don't want any other, and I only want to pay twenty cents."

The girl looked at Ellen, she saw determination written all over her eager face and shining out from her dark eyes, and she remembered her own childhood not so many years ago.

"I guess if my father was here he'd let you have that geranium for twenty cents," she said.

Ellen's eyes shone, and she paid over her two ten-cent pieces and hastily seized her property.

When they reached Lois's room, Ellen put the red geranium on a little table in front of the wide window. There were white muslin curtains tied back with white cords and tassels. The walls were a soft gray, and although the cushion on the window seat was many-hued, and so were the rugs, the general

effect was more subdued than Ellen liked, and this blaze of scarlet pleased her.

A little later they heard the sound of horses' hoofs and wheels in the distance.

"She is coming! She is coming!" cried Lois, and Ellen had a bitter pang at the rapture of that tone.

It was only the ice-cart lumbering down the street.

The children were in the parlor with their faces pressed close against the window. A bright fire was burning on the hearth and Lois's mother sat before it with her sewing.

Here Jessie was at last! The carriage stopped at the gate, and a golden-haired girl alighted, and came swiftly along the walk. Ellen and Lois ran out to meet her. Lois flung her arms about Jessie.

"You dear, dear thing!" she said. "It is so good to have you here!"

Then she looked at Jessie, and saw that her face was wet with tears, and she remembered that this day, which was the happiest in her own life, was perhaps the saddest in Jessie's, for she had just parted from her father and mother, who were to sail for Europe on account of her father's ill health.

Lois felt very shy and could not say anything more. Her own joy seemed positively wrong.

Jessie smiled bravely through her tears.

“It is so lovely to be coming to live with you, Lois,” she said, “and it was dear of you, Ellen, to be here to meet me.”

Jessie put one arm around Lois and the other around Ellen. Ellen did not feel any longer that Jessie was to separate them; it seemed instead as if they would all three be drawn more closely together.

“Lois and I have bought a scarlet geranium for you, Jessie.”

It was impossible to keep back this great announcement any longer.

“It was your present,” said Lois.

Ellen no longer wanted to have the whole glory of the gift.

“It was our present,” she said; “you know you put your money in my bank.”

CHAPTER II

THE WITCH KITTEN

THE first evening was the cosiest that Lois had ever known. It seemed like a party, having three at supper instead of two. Lois looked across the table at Jessie, and thought how wonderful it was that she was not merely spending one night with them, as she often did, but at least a year of nights.

After tea, when they sat before the fire in the parlor, Mrs. Page began to read Scott's "Talisman" aloud, and only those who are used to being the solitary audience can know the rapture of sharing the pleasure with another listener. Even when not a word was said it was an intense joy just to look across at Jessie's expressive face. Presently a piercing mew was heard, and Lois opened the door for Minnie, her cat. Minnie had been spending her evenings in Lois's lap of late.

"Sweetheart," Lois said remorsefully, "it was too bad that I forgot all about you. She is perfectly devoted to me," she explained to Jessie; "sometimes I will find her waiting by my chair, and the moment I sit down she hops into my lap."

"The dear little thing!" said Jessie. "Come, Minnie," she called caressingly, "come and say good evening to me. I am going to live here now."

Then a strange thing happened; Minnie, the constant, devoted Minnie, walked across the room, past Lois, and jumped into Jessie's lap.

"Dear, friendly little pussy," said Jessie.

"She likes the chair you are in, and your gown is woollier than Lois's," said Mrs. Page practically.

"Oh, mother, you don't understand Minnie," protested Lois. "She knows how nice Jessie is, and she wants to make her feel at home."

Nevertheless it was something of a trial to have Minnie's affections divided with another.

That night after they went to bed the two children talked so late that Mrs. Page finally came to the door and stopped them by saying that if they were going to talk so long every night she should have to put Jessie in the spare room. Early in the morning the happy chatter began again, and Mrs. Page noticed what a different expression her little girl had as she came into the dining-room with her arm around Jessie's waist. Jessie was almost a year older than Lois and she was much taller. She was not pretty, but she had such a wholesome, bright face that her friends never thought of her as plain, and then her

golden hair was a great attraction. Lois wished that she herself had golden hair. She had said so that morning, as Jessie stood before the bureau brushing her yellow locks.

"Would you like my nose and my freckles as well as my hair?" Jessie asked, turning around with a smile, "because, if you would, I should be glad to give them to you."

"Oh, Jessie, you dear, dear thing!" said Lois, giving her a hug.

And so the new order began, and as the happy days sped by, Mrs. Page rejoiced in the success of her experiment. As for Jessie herself, it was hard at first to get used to the contracted life in a country town, for heretofore her time had been divided between New York and the free out-of-door life of Brierfield Farm, three miles from the village. When the spring days began to lengthen and the buds to swell, and the birds found their way back from the south, Jessie often longed for the house on the edge of the woods, for the pony on which she rode bare-back, for her faithful collie dog, but most of all for her light-hearted father and mother and her older sister, with whom she had wandered through the fields and woods as contentedly as if they were of her own age. Now all was sadly changed, for her

father, who was once the merriest of the company, was under the dark cloud of illness, and the ocean divided her from him and her mother, while Cicely was at Bryn Mawr.

Gradually, however, Jessie adjusted herself to life under the new conditions, and as she was very fond both of Lois and Mrs. Page, she soon felt entirely at home.

Everything conspired to make her feel so, even Minnie, who added to the good cheer of the household by presenting the family with a pair of kittens.

If kittens were not quite the absorbing interest to Lois that they had been before Jessie came, they were a great event, and she and Jessie visited the wood-cellar with joy. Mrs. Page said that each of the children could have a kitten for her own, until it was old enough to be given away.

Now there was not the slightest doubt that one kitten was so much prettier than the other that Lois had a struggle in her own mind as to whether to give Jessie the beauty of the family or to keep it. As an only child everything had formerly revolved around Lois, and now there was always some one else to be considered, — not that this fact in the least dampened her pleasure in Jessie's society.

“This one is the prettiest,” said Lois, holding up

a white and gray kitten beautifully marked. "See her little white face with the gray hair parted in the middle, and the gray shawl on her back that looks as if it were just tumbling off. It is that lovely, silvery gray like blue fox."

"Yes, it is one of the prettiest kittens I ever saw," said Jessie.

"The other is n't very pretty," said Lois. "Of course I always love tiger cats, but it is n't marked so prettily as Minnie is; it has a smoochy, mixed-up face."

"No, it is n't so pretty, but it is a dear," said Jessie.

Lois nerved herself for a great sacrifice. "Jessie, you must have the maltese and white kitten," she said.

"I? Oh, no, Minnie is n't my cat. I don't mind, truly, which I have. Anything in the shape of a darling furry kitten will suit me."

"And you really don't mind?" Lois began slowly.

"Why, of course I don't. What difference does it make so long as they are both here?"

Now it made a great deal of difference to Lois, for she liked to have a thing for her very own. For a fortnight the kittens led a placid life in the wood-cellar, and then they were moved up into the play-

room, where Lois had her doll house. It was then that the children began to get the real good of the kittens.

"There is something very queer about your kitten's front paws," said Lois to Jessie one afternoon. "They look so big and clumsy."

"Why, it has got two more toes than it ought to have!" Jessie exclaimed.

It made Lois feel uncomfortable to see these extra toes. It was as if a person had five fingers and two thumbs.

"It was so dark in the wood-cellar I never noticed. Poor Jessie! Don't you want to change?"

"No, indeed! It is my kitten. If I had a child that turned out to be funny-looking I would n't want to change it, and besides, why shouldn't you have the best-looking kitten?"

"But it seems so selfish of me," sighed Lois.

"Don't let's say anything more about it."

"Does it make you feel crawly to see its six toes?" Lois asked anxiously.

"No, I think it is quite interesting. It is so unlike any one else's kitten."

Lois always preferred things that were just like other people's, but she was thankful that Jessie felt differently.

Presently Mr. Morgan, Ellen's father, came to make a call. Mrs. Page was out, but Lois and Jessie saw him coming up the steps. Mr. Morgan was one of the few people of whom Lois was not afraid. She had loved him dearly ever since she had first seen him, a year ago.

"He is going away. Maggie has n't told him we are in," she said in a disappointed voice.

"He is probably making a lot of parish calls, and can't stop to bother with children," said Jessie.

"I am sure if he knew I was at home he would want to see me." Lois ran down the stairs and out of the front door and caught up with him, just as he reached the gate.

"Oh, Mr. Morgan, please come back," she cried breathlessly. "Jessie and I are at home, and there are some kittens I know you would like to see. We are your parishioners just as much as mother is," she added.

"Well, if I have new parishioners, for the kittens are new, I suppose, I shall surely have to come back, for I always make it a rule to call on new parishioners the first fortnight after they come to town."

Lois laughed. "I meant that Jessie and I are your parishioners," she explained gayly.

"Well, Jessie," said Mr. Morgan, taking both her hands in his, "it is a great pleasure to have you so near us. And now I am to see the kittens?"

"We'll bring them down to you," said Jessie.

"Minnie would be nearly out of her mind if we did. You won't mind coming upstairs, will you, Mr. Morgan?" Lois asked.

"I want you to find a name for my kitten," Lois said after they reached the playroom. "You gave Gem and Jane such beautiful names."

She handed him the lovely gray and white one.

"What a beauty this is!" he said. "It seems to have on a chinchilla shawl, like the one my aunt used to wear. Suppose you call her Chinchilla. Chilly will make a good nickname."

"The other is Jessie's," Lois told him. "It is rather plain and it has six toes."

Mr. Morgan inspected the small morsel of fur gravely.

"It is a witch kitten," he announced. "How fortunate you are, Jessie! A double-pawed kitten is always supposed to bring its possessor the rarest luck. Suppose you call it Mittens. I had a witch cat named Mittens when I was a boy."

"And did you have great luck?" Lois asked. She was already beginning to wish that the double-pawed

kitten belonged to her, but speedily stifled this selfish thought, for dear Jessie deserved all the luck she could get.

"Yes. I had a very serious illness while he was with us."

"I don't call that good luck," Lois said dolefully.

"Perhaps you would have died if it had n't been for the witch kitten," Jessie suggested, with a smile.

"That was the way I looked at it," said Mr. Morgan gravely. "Then our barn caught on fire, and part of it burned, but we got the animals out and the house did not catch. There was the witch kitten again. If it had n't been for him we might have lost everything; and I had trouble with my eyes that year, and had to leave school, and the out-of-door life made me strong and healthy. Altogether, there was no end to the debt of gratitude that I owed that kitten, for without him I might have thought I was unlucky."

Jessie gave Mittens a little squeeze. "I am so glad I have a witch kitten," she said.

CHAPTER III

BRIERFIELD

It seemed to Lois and Jessie as if spring would never come, for there was an April snowstorm a few days after Jessie arrived, and the snow lingered on the north side of the house and in the woods; gradually, however, it disappeared, and the green began to creep over the hills and meadows.

At last there came such a warm April morning that Jessie said, "Spring has really come! I am sure the mayflowers are out on the hill back of Brierfield. Oh! dear Aunt Elizabeth, may n't we have the carriage this afternoon and all drive over to Brierfield and pick them?"

Jessie's coming had made a great change already. Formerly Mrs. Page used to have to urge Lois to go out, unless some child came to play with her, but now she found it hard to get the children to come in even at mealtimes. One of the changes that Jessie's coming brought, was the use of the horses that had been left at Brierfield. Whenever Mrs. Page wanted a drive she had only to go to the tele-

phone and order a horse to appear at a certain hour. The telephone had been a parting gift from Mrs. Matthews to Lois's mother.

"Please, Aunt Elizabeth, can't we go?" Jessie persisted.

Mrs. Page was busy finishing a spring frock for Lois.

"I am afraid I ought n't to go this afternoon," she said. "I have the rest of my seeds to plant, and I want to finish this dress so that Lois can wear it to church to-morrow. We might go next Saturday."

"It may rain next Saturday," Jessie objected, "and I am afraid the mayflowers will be through blossoming."

"I don't mind wearing my winter dress all the spring," said Lois.

Mrs. Page hesitated. Perhaps, after all, it was better to give the children this pleasure, for spring only comes once a year.

"We will go this afternoon," she decided, "and you children may come into the garden with me this morning while I plant the seeds."

A little later they went out into the sunny garden, and the children helped Mrs. Page make a trench for her nasturtium seeds.

"Please, dear Aunt Elizabeth, may n't Lois and

Mar. Reese

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 563
LAKE WILSON, MINN.

"I have a garden, just a small one?" begged Jessie. "I always had one at home, to plant anything I liked in, and one year I mixed flower seeds and vegetable seeds together, and squashes and nasturtiums and melons and poppies came up side by side."

Mrs. Page laughed. "If I give you and Lois each a bed I shall want you to make them as pretty as possible, so as to be an ornament to my garden," she said.

Mrs. Page's slender figure was enveloped in a brown linen apron with pockets, in which were packages of seeds. Even in the brown apron she looked more dainty than most people did in their best clothes, Lois thought. Lois's mind had been reveling in wild combinations of vegetables and flowers, and it was a disappointment to find that their gardens must conform to the rule of their well-ordered lives.

"Don't you think it would be nice, mother, to have flowers in the middle, and a border of melons and squashes?" she ventured.

"No, I think you will find a flower garden is enough to keep you busy. You know you will have to weed it."

Lois made a little grimace.

Mrs. Page always spent a great deal of time in her garden, and she had often tried to induce Lois to

help her weed, but Lois was always sure to remember some very important thing that had to be done at once. In Jessie, however, Mrs. Page found a garden companion after her own heart.

She gave the children a variety of seeds. Jessie had a decided plan, but Lois did not know how she wanted to arrange her bed, and finally copied Jessie. They planted mignonette and pansy seed in a border around the beds, and inside they put a glorious mixture of seeds, — nasturtiums, verbenas, portulacas, poppies, and cosmos. They could hardly wait, they were in such a hurry for everything to come up and blossom. They had almost finished planting the seeds when Ellen Morgan joined them. She was on her way home from the village, where she had been doing some errands for her mother, and her hands were full of small bundles.

“Mother’s in an awful hurry for these things,” she said, “so I can’t stop, but I just wanted to know if you and Jessie can come to play with me this afternoon.”

“We can’t, because we are going to drive over to Brierfield,” said Lois.

Ellen looked very much disappointed.

She sat down on the end of a bench and asked what they were planting.

"Anne and I have a vegetable garden," Ellen told them. "It isn't as pretty as a flower garden, but we expect to have lovely things to eat, — melons and cucumbers and squashes. We are going to have a party when all the vegetables are ripe" (Ellen had thought of this on the spur of the moment), "and we'll invite you."

"How nice!" Lois was already tasting the melons in imagination. "We wanted some melons and squashes in our garden," she said regretfully, "but mother thought they would spoil the looks of the flower beds."

"Ellen, I am afraid you ought to be going home, if your mother is in a hurry for those things," said Mrs. Page, "but why can't you come back and dine here, and go to Brierfield with us this afternoon?"

"Oh, Mrs. Page, how perfectly lovely!" said Ellen ecstatically.

She rose, but lingered to play with Minnie, who came along at the moment.

When Ellen finally reached home she ran up to the room where her mother was at work with a seamstress, dumped the parcels in a heap on the table, and said breathlessly, "Mother, I'm going to dine with the Pages and we are going to drive to Brierfield and pick mayflowers this afternoon."



“ANNE AND I HAVE A VEGETABLE GARDEN”

"How delightful!" exclaimed Mrs. Morgan, looking up from her sewing. "That is why it took Ellen three quarters of an hour to go to the village," she thought. "You can take the sugar down to Almira," she said. "She is waiting for it."

In the kitchen Ellen's mind was distracted by some very fat raisins that Almira was stoning, and when she found what the dessert was to be, she was almost sorry she had promised to dine at the Pages'. She consoled herself, however, by eating a handful of the raisins.

From the kitchen window Ellen had a view of the vegetable garden that was to be such a source of joy to them later, and she suddenly had a bright idea. When she returned to the Pages' she had some choice seeds in her pocket, and before they started on the drive she went out into the garden all by herself, on the pretense of finding Minnie. Hastily glancing around to make sure that no one was looking, she put half the seeds in the centre of Lois's bed, and the other half in the middle of Jessie's. Her face broke into a mischievous smile.

"I guess they'll have a nice surprise," she thought.

As they were starting on the drive, she suddenly gave a chuckle.

"What are you laughing at, Ellen?" asked Lois.

"I am laughing because I am so very happy," Ellen answered.

"It did n't sound like that kind of a laugh," said Lois.

"Is n't it fortunate Ellen happened to come along to-day," she added; "we've had a lot of luck since the witch kitten came."

"Let's take the witch kitten with us," said Ellen, "then we shall be sure to find lots of mayflowers."

"My dear Ellen!" gasped Mrs. Page.

"I am afraid the kitten and Jessie's dog would n't agree very well," said Lois.

"Joy is very gentle. I wish, Aunt Elizabeth, that you would let me take Joy back with us just for a day or two," Jessie pleaded.

"That would n't be safe. Joy may be gentle, but Minnie is not; she is very fierce when she is taking care of her kittens."

"Why do you call her Aunt Elizabeth?" asked Ellen. "She is n't any relation to you, is she?"

"She and my mother were friends when they were little girls."

"Oh," said Ellen. She felt very much "out of it."

They were already reaching the outskirts of the town, and very soon they came to a stretch of wood road. It made Lois feel so happy to see the tiny leaf-buds and to watch some birds flying overhead, that it almost seemed as if she must cry out, "Spring is here! spring is here! and afterwards will come summer, and there won't be any icy winter for a very long time!"

But Lois's delight was even greater when they were climbing the wooded hill behind Brierfield farm. Ellen shouted with joy, and Jessie felt like some wild thing that had escaped from a cage. The children thought there never had been such a spring day. The sky was blue, with just a few fleecy clouds floating in it, and the tall pines and fir-trees made such a thick green shelter that it seemed as if summer had come. There was the resinous smell of the pines and of the fir balsams and hemlocks, the soft green of the moss, and, most delicious of all, the delicate fragrance of the mayflowers. Jessie was the first to find them; she held up a long spray of pink blossoms and gave it to Mrs. Page.

Ellen immediately pulled some up by the roots.

"You must n't do that," said Jessie. "Father never lets us pull any roots, for if we do, the mayflowers will soon die out."

Suddenly there was an addition to their company. A yellow and white dog came running up the path, and presently there was the mingling of furry paws and childish arms.

"Joy, you darling, did you know my voice?" said Jessie. The collie had leaped upon her, and was licking her face with passionate devotion. She put her arms around his neck, and her tears rained upon his head.

"She loves Joy just as much as I love Minnie," thought Lois.

They stayed in the pine woods until Mrs. Page and Jessie had their baskets full of mayflowers, and Ellen and Lois had half filled theirs, for they had taken several excursions, and there had been a great deal to look at and to talk about.

"I suppose if we are to stop at Brierfield for a cup of tea, we ought to be going," said Mrs. Page, looking at her watch.

The parlor at Brierfield was a long room, with a low ceiling with brown rafters. Even in its half-dismantled state, it looked more attractive to Jessie than any room she had ever seen. There were no curtains at the windows now, but one could see the woods and the hills all the better, and although the sofas and chairs had on linen covers, nothing

could disguise their quaint, old-fashioned shape. The rugs had been put away, but the books were left in the low bookcases, and a bright fire was burning on the hearth, and near it was a little tea-table. There was a gap in the room where the grand piano had once been, that was now blocking up Mrs. Page's small parlor, where it had gone in order that Jessie might keep on with her music lessons.

Presently Emmeline, the farmer's wife and the care-taker, brought in a waiter with tea and lemon and little cakes.

"Emmeline!" cried Jessie, and she threw her arms about the old servant.

"How d'ye do, Miss Jessie? You look real well. I guess it agrees with you to live with Miss Lois."

After she had had a talk with Emmeline, Mrs. Page gave the children hot lemonade, with plenty of sugar and just a dash of tea.

Joy planted himself at Jessie's feet and she fed him with portions of her cake. When she had no more he went around to Lois. She was afraid of all dogs, and felt very uncomfortable as he fixed his beseeching eyes on her. Presently he touched her with his paw. She hastily dropped the rest of her cake and moved back.

"I guess you'd have been frightened away by

the big spider all right, if you had been little Miss Muffet," said Ellen. "Come here, Joy. I am not a bit afraid of you."

Joy came. He jumped up on Ellen and began to lick her face.

"I didn't say I wanted you to kiss me," said Ellen. "Get down! Jessie, make him get down."

Jessie only laughed. "You should n't have invited him to come, if you had n't wanted him," she said.

"I wish we could come to these woods every Saturday, mother," said Lois, as they drove away.

Mrs. Page felt, as the children did, as if she had not had such a happy afternoon for a very long time.

"There is always so much that ought to be done," she sighed.

CHAPTER IV

BARBARA FRIETCHIE

ALL through this happy spring there was only one part of Lois's life that she did not enjoy, and this was school; for it seemed such a waste of sunny hours, when the birds were singing and the trees were coming into leaf, and the seeds in the garden were beginning to sprout, to have to leave this delightful out-of-door world and shut one's self up for hours in a stuffy room, and have tiresome lessons in numbers, or draw maps, or read aloud. The garden was altogether too interesting to leave. They could almost see the plants grow from day to day.

"There are a lot of queer things coming up in the middle of my bed, where I meant to plant my fuchsia," said Lois one morning. "What can they be? They don't look like weeds."

"And I have some funny things in the centre of mine, too," said Jessie, "just where I meant to put my scarlet geranium."

"That's a pretty thing," said Lois.

"It looks as if it were going to be a cucum-

ber vine," said Jessie, who was something of a farmer, "but I don't see how it could have got there."

A few days later, the superior knowledge of Mrs. Page and Joe Mills, the gardener, was all that was needed to show that these intruders were cucumber vines, squash vines, and melons.

"Ellen must have planted them there," said Lois. "Don't you remember, when we went to Brierfield, she went down into the garden to find Minnie, and how she laughed afterwards, because she was so happy, she said? I knew it was n't that kind of a laugh."

Lois could hardly wait until the next morning to see Ellen. Unluckily Ellen was a little late at school, and the other children were all in their seats when she came in very fast and flushed, as if she had run all the way. Ellen had a desk on the right-hand side of Lois now, and Lois looked across at her and smiled. She meant that smile to say, "I have so much to talk about at recess, that I can hardly wait."

Ellen smiled too, then she cautiously took a piece of paper and a pencil out of her desk. She held them so that Lois could see them, and then partly covered them with her hand. As soon as Miss Benton was

busy with one of the classes, Ellen handed the paper and pencil to Lois. "You can write whatever you have to say," the action seemed to suggest.

Lois hesitated. She was a conscientious child and did not like to break one of the rules of the school, but her curiosity was very strong, and after a while it conquered her principles. She wrote, "Was it you who planted all those vegetables in our gardens? I think it was very funny, but mother made Joe Mills move them into the vegetable garden, all but one cucumber vine for each of us."

The note was passed back without being detected by the teacher, and Ellen took another half sheet out of her desk. She sat lost in thought for a few moments, leaning her head on her hand. Finally, she seized her pencil and began to write very fast, as if fearing that her inspiration would leave her. Presently she handed the paper to Lois. Lois spread it open and glanced up furtively.

"Lois Page, is that a note that you have?" said Miss Benton severely. "Bring it straight to me. Any information that you have received will doubtless be of value to all of us."

Lois read her note through hastily, before complying with her teacher's request. It ran as follows : —

Lois, Lois, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With squash vine and melon,
All planted by Ellen,
And cucumbers all in a row.

Lois was quite sure the information would not be useful to the school, and Miss Benton seemed to think so too, for when she had read the note she put it into her desk.

"You and Ellen can stay after school," she said.

And then she began to tell the scholars about the reading of patriotic pieces that she planned to have on the Friday that came nearest to Decoration Day. She wanted each boy and girl to bring some piece about slavery or the civil war.

"We will have a preliminary reading next week Friday," she said, "and we will then choose the two best readers, those who have the fewest criticisms, to head the different sides, and select six or eight others to take part in a programme which you can all invite your parents to attend."

Lois felt a joy in this announcement, mixed with a fear. She was sure she was one of the best readers, and hoped she might be chosen to head a side. And yet what a trial it would be to have to stand on the platform and face, not only the scholars, but

also a group of mothers, and still worse, fathers! The children could talk of little else for the next day or two, and Lois made her mother's life a burden until she found something for her to read. The choice finally fell on "Barbara Frietchie."

Jessie had settled what her selection should be the moment the plan was suggested. She meant to read Whittier's "Astræa at the Capitol: Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia, 1862," a poem that her father was very fond of and had read to her more than once.

Ellen browsed in her father's library, and made his life a torment to him until he had got down a row of green volumes for her, and patiently helped her choose a poem. He advised first one thing and then another, and after all, Ellen made her own selection. She became fascinated by a poem of Longfellow's called "The Slave in the Dismal Swamp," and she went around the house reading it in blood-curdling tones.

"In dark fens of the Dismal Swamp
The hunted Negro lay ;
He saw the fire of the midnight camp,
And heard at times a horse's tramp
And a bloodhound's distant bay."

.

“On his forehead he bore the brand of shame,
And the rags, that hid his mangled frame,
Were the livery of disgrace.”

Lois, meanwhile, was driving her mother to the verge of madness by insisting upon reading “Barbara Frietchie” to her half a dozen times a day. Jessie, on the other hand, read her poem over in solitude.

Lois tried first one way of reading and then another.

“‘Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,
But spare your country’s flag,’ she said,”

she repeated dramatically. “Mother, do you think I ought to bow my head when I read that, or shake it from side to side?”

She looked so very far from the gray-haired Barbara, as she gave her head first a nod and then a shake, that Mrs. Page burst into unfeeling laughter.

“Mother, I think it is too bad of you to laugh,” Lois protested. And presently she came to the lines,

“‘Who touches a hair of yon gray head
Dies like a dog! March on!’ he said.

“Mother, do you think I made my voice deep enough? Did it sound like a man’s? I think it is better to read in different voices, don’t you?”

Mrs. Page was almost hysterical now. “My dear

child, you read a great deal better two days ago, before you had this craze for the dramatic. Just read straight ahead in your natural voice, and perfectly simply."

"But, mother, you ought to hear Ellen read the hunted negro in the Dismal Swamp, and the bloodhound's curdling cry! It sends cold shivers down your back."

"Luckily, Ellen's reading is not my responsibility. If it were, I should pass into an early grave, between you."

As the day for the preliminary reading approached, Lois grew more and more nervous. She read "Barbara Frietchie" over six times on Thursday: twice to Jessie, three times to her mother, and when Mrs. Page's patience finally gave out, she selected Maggie for a victim, and going out into the kitchen, she read the whole poem through to her.

"'Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,
But spare your country's flag,' she said."

She had finally decided not to make any gesture at this point.

"Is n't that great, Maggie?" she asked.

Maggie was so much impressed, that it almost decided Lois to adopt the dramatic manner, in spite of her mother's counsels.

Friday afternoon came at last, and then the awful space of time that preceded her own reading, when Lois sat trembling in her seat, as the children were called on alphabetically. Oh, why did not her name begin with one of the first letters in the alphabet, like fortunate Dora Robertson's, who stood up and read a spirited war piece in a mouse-like voice, and then sat down with the pleased expression of the martyr whose sufferings are quickly over. Ellen Morgan came next. She walked to the platform with the brave exterior of the general preparing for battle.

To say that the reading of "The Slave in the Dismal Swamp" produced a distinct sensation, is to put it mildly. Whatever Ellen's faults of delivery might be, there was a passion of earnestness about her, an entire forgetfulness of herself, that turned the smile that came at first into respectful attention, and then admiration. As the children listened, it seemed as if they could see the hunted negro, and hear with him the horse's tramp and the blood-hound's distant bay.

When Ellen sat down, there were tears in her eyes, and there were tears in Miss Benton's eyes, too.

"How had Ellen done it?" Lois asked herself. It was all so very simple, but Lois had a conviction

in her heart that she herself, if she were to read "Barbara Frietchie" over a hundred times, for as many days, could never equal the simple pathos of Ellen's voice.

Ethel Smith, Edward Cory, Gertrude Brown, and other girls and boys followed, but no one began to approach Ellen. Finally Jessie's turn came. Lois had heard her read her poem only once. Jessie went up on the platform with the same quiet dignity with which she did everything. Lois thought how very lovely she looked in her new lilac gingham frock.

Jessie had a voice that was like music, and the poem she read with the utmost simplicity was so beautiful that the children were as quiet as if they were in church.

"I knew that truth would crush the lie,—
Somehow, some time, the end would be;
Yet scarcely dared I hope to see
The triumph with my mortal eye.

"But now I see it! In the sun
A free flag floats from yonder dome,
And at the nation's hearth and home
The justice long delayed is done."

Lois looked out of the window at the flag on the flagstaff, as it gently floated in the breeze. It sud-

denly came over her, as no lesson in history had ever taught her, what the civil war had meant. First there was Ellen's slave, and then the war had come and made him free. There was a little catch in her throat, and she saw the flag now through a blur of tears.

Joel Carpenter came next; and as there were no K's in school, Lois's turn would come afterwards. She clutched her book, and her heart began to beat very fast. It seemed no longer of any use to try to read, for no one else had begun to do as well as Ellen and Jessie. Then Lois thought of Maggie and her honest enthusiasm. The thought of Maggie gave her courage as she walked across the school-room floor and mounted the platform. For one moment her heart failed her, and then she made up her mind that she would read "Barbara Frietchie" as she had never read it before. She opened her book nervously and glanced down at the printed page, then she made a flurried bow and prepared to read, but the words that met her astonished gaze were "Cobbler Keezar's Vision." For a moment she was half dazed, then she recognized the horrible truth that she had lost her place. She turned the leaves hastily. In the confusion of the moment she had forgotten in what part of the book "Barbara

Frietchie" lay hidden. "To Englishmen," "The Preacher," "The Tent on the Beach," — she turned hastily to the table of contents, but even there "Barbara Frietchie" seemed to take a teasing pleasure in keeping herself unrevealed. Here she was at last, — "Barbara Frietchie," page 279.

Lois made another bow, a bow of humiliation, and then she began to read. All the joy of the day had gone for her, and all the hope of outshining Ellen and Jessie. She could hardly find her voice. She could hear herself going over the pages with the mouse-like quiet with which Dora Robertson had read. When she came to —

" 'Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,
But spare your country's flag,' she said,"

Lois read the words faintly, as if poor Barbara's spirit had been completely quenched by her strenuous day; and she made Stonewall Jackson say, —

" 'Who touches a hair of yon gray head
Dies like a dog! March on!' he said,"

in the gentle voice of a lady ordering a cup of tea. It was all too terrible, but she got through it somehow, and when she made another bow at the end, and finally sank into her seat, the only comfort she could find in life was the certainty that this horrible

ordeal would not have to be repeated on the following Friday, for no one with a thinking brain could put her reading among the first ten.

When every one had finished, even Reuben Morgan, who came at the end of the school alphabet, and who, to Lois's comfort, read in the same poor-spirited way in which she had, the criticisms of the reading began.

Lois hardly heard what the children said, until her attention was caught by a few words in Ethel Smith's critical, clear-cut tones, "Lois Page made three bows."

Ellen and Jessie were unanimously chosen to head the sides. Lois felt that she ought to be glad that her two best friends had this honor, but she could be glad of nothing now; she could only wish that she could hide her head forever in some spot far from the light of day.

As Lois and Jessie turned in at the gate, they saw Mittens sitting on the front doorstep, in a calm, unruffled way.

"You are always lucky in everything that happens to you, Jessie," said Lois. "I wish I had a witch kitten."

CHAPTER V

A SUMMER EXCHANGE

WHEN school was over, and Jessie went to spend the long vacation with her aunt and sister, Lois was so unhappy that it seemed as if she could hardly live through the separation.

The day after her friend's departure, Lois, with a pale, miserable face, came to her mother.

"Mother, it looks so scant in my closet, with all Jessie's things gone," she said. "I don't see how I am going to stand it until she gets back."

Mrs. Page looked up from a stocking that she was darning.

"My dear child," she returned, "I wish you had more of Jessie's way of finding happiness everywhere."

"But, mother, it is easy for her to be happy, for she is going to be with her aunt and Cicely. That is one of the worst parts of it, that she was so glad to go."

"But even if she had been the one to stay here, she would have contrived to make herself contented.

I think she would be going this very minute to see the Morgans, and that is what I advise you to do."

Things looked a little brighter, as Lois put on her hat and shut the front door behind her, and her face lighted up with a smile when she met Ellen turning in at the gate.

"You dear thing," said Lois, "I was just going to see you. Come out on the piazza and we'll decide what to play."

"I have come to tell you that I am going away to-morrow," said Ellen, with a solemn face.

"You are going away!" Lois felt that her last ray of comfort had gone. "Where are you going?" she inquired in a subdued voice.

"To Hollisford, on an exchange with father. We are to drive there and back, and perhaps we'll stay over Monday."

"What a lovely thing to do!" said Lois, with a sigh of envy.

"Yes, it is nice, and the nicest part is that father says I can ask some girl to go too. I am wondering if Ethel Smith would enjoy it."

At the mention of Ethel's name poor Lois had a stab of jealousy.

"I know Ethel would like it very much," she said slowly.

"I am not sure that it would not be better to ask Dora Robertson," Ellen continued; "she does not have so much fun as Ethel has."

"Yes, Dora would just love it."

"Goosie!" and Ellen put her arm impetuously around Lois's waist; "do you suppose I'd ask any one in the world but you? I can't help teasing you, because I can always get a rise out of you."

"Do you mean that you and your father are going to take me on a driving journey?" Lois asked, with shining eyes.

"Perhaps your mother won't let you go," said the irrepressible Ellen. "In that case I'll have a chance to ask Gertrude Brown."

But Lois only smiled back at Ellen; she was beyond being teased now.

Mrs. Page was delighted that Lois was to have the pleasure of a little journey, and the next day, after an early lunch, Mr. Morgan and Ellen drove up to the gate, with Diana the brown horse, in the capacious buggy that was wide enough for three.

Mrs. Page came out to see them off.

"Your rubbers and raincoat are in the dress-suit case," she said, as she put it in under the seat.

"Mother, it can't rain," Lois objected. "There is n't a cloud in the sky."

“It may be a weather-breeder. It is well to be prepared for everything. There are some sandwiches and cookies in this box, in case you are hungry before you get to Hollisford.”

Oh, the joy of that drive! There would be five long hours before Hollisford was reached; five hours of summer sunshine, alternating with shady wood roads, and highways between meadows full of daisies, or else sweet with new-mown hay. Five hours of the bliss of out-of-doors, in company with Ellen and her father!

At first it was enough happiness just to sit still and watch the landscape, the exquisite fresh green of trees, meadows, and hillsides; to hear the rustle of the wind among the leaves, to watch a squirrel as he ran along a stone wall and vanished among the branches of an oak-tree; to exchange friendly greetings with the dwellers in the lonely farmhouses scattered along the road; but a time came when the shadows began to lengthen, when the luncheon had all been eaten and they wanted more, when Ellen asked how long it would be before they got to Hollisford. Then it was that Mr. Morgan proposed playing travelers' whist. They agreed that every live creature, man, woman, child, and animals of all sorts, should count one, excepting the cat, and

she, for some mysterious reason known only to Ellen, was to count five, while a cat in the window was to count ten. Lois felt that Ellen had much the best of it, for she was on the left-hand side, and whenever they met a carriage, it turned to the right and passed along on Ellen's side of the road. Once they met a three-seated wagon drawn by two horses and with three people on a seat, and this put Ellen far ahead of Lois.

But at last, to Lois's joy, there was a weather-beaten, vine-covered, gray house on her side of the way, close by the roadside, and at the window were a maltese cat and two maltese kittens.

"Look at the sweet things, Ellen," said Lois. "Are n't they darlings? Three cats in the window for me. That makes thirty all at once. I am ahead of you now."

"There is only one cat in the window," Ellen said. "Kittens oughtn't to count as much as cats. They ought n't to count more than half as much, ought they, father?"

"But they are more than half as big as the cat," Lois protested.

"As we can't stop to measure all the cats we pass, I think we'll call it ten for kittens as well as cats," Mr. Morgan decided.

"Very well," said Ellen in an injured tone, "but I don't think it is fair."

Just then a farm laborer and his wife and two little flaxen-haired girls, one in a pink dress, the other in blue, and a boy in a torn jacket, strolled out from a house farther down the road, crossed over, and came along on Ellen's side of the way.

"Five for me," she cried.

"But they started on my side of the road," said Lois.

"I can't help that. They came over on my side finally."

"If kittens were half what cats were, children ought to be half what grown people are," said Lois.

"But they are not. Father decided kittens and cats should count alike."

"I only said *if* they were."

"But they are not."

The last mile was enlivened by more than one dispute, for the children were tired and hungry. The eating of the sandwiches and cookies now seemed to have taken place in a remote past. Even Lois, who a few hours before had wanted the afternoon to stretch on and on and never end, was glad when they stopped at a white tavern with the sign "Hollisford House" hanging before it.

Lois had traveled so little that her entrance into this country inn was a great event. It looked very pleasant and homelike, with its broad piazzas across the first and second stories. The inn stood at one end of the village common, and facing it across the green was a brick church with a white belfry.

The group of men who were smoking in the office of the Hollisford House filled Lois with consternation, and she wondered that Mr. Morgan and Ellen could take the formidable clerk so calmly. He showed them to their rooms, up one flight of stairs and at the end of a winding passage. Mr. Morgan had a small room, and Lois and Ellen shared a very large one opening out of it.

“What a queer, rambling old room!” said Ellen; “it looks just as if it might be haunted.”

“Don’t, Ellen, you make me feel quite crawly.”

Ellen went over to the windows and opened the blinds to let in the late sunlight.

“Oh, Ellen, what a lovely view!” said Lois.

Two of the windows were at the back of the house, and looked out on a swiftly flowing little brook that came rushing down between its green banks, as if it were about to run under the tavern, but thinking better of it, took a sharp turn to the right. There were willow-trees on either side of the brook, and

in the distance beyond the vegetable garden was a peaceful meadow where two black and white cows were grazing, and far away at the horizon rose a round, green hill. Lois was enchanted with the quiet beauty of the scene, but Ellen was more interested in a white-haired old woman who was taking some pillow-cases off the clothes-line.

“I wonder why they have such a very old person to help do the work,” said Ellen; “and why do you suppose she has left that feather-bed so very near the brook?”

“I never noticed the feather-bed.”

Supper was a formidable meal to poor Lois, because they had to eat it in a very large dining-room, at a long table half filled with guests. Lois felt that her shoes had a too conspicuous squeak, as she crossed the uncarpeted wooden floor. She longed to sit between Ellen and Mr. Morgan, but Ellen also preferred to sit in the middle. As Lois was nearest the kitchen, the maid came to her first for orders.

“Beefsteak, baked potatoes, and toast,” she said in an indifferent tone.

Lois wanted all three, but she was afraid this might seem too grasping, so she said in an almost inaudible voice, “Baked potatoes and toast, please,”

only to find that both Ellen and Mr. Morgan said with bold courage, "All three."

When supper was over, they went upstairs to the large room, and Mr. Morgan read aloud to the two little girls from "Ivanhoe" until their bedtime.

"I suppose we ought to shut the blinds," said Ellen, as she and Lois began to undress. "The side windows open on the piazza, and any one could look in. It would be very easy for a burglar to get in," she added dramatically.

"He would n't find anything to steal," Lois said cheerfully; "we have n't any watches, and I have only ten cents mother gave me to put into the contribution-box to-morrow."

"If he finds the ten cents you can tell him what it is for, and he will leave it for the good cause," said Ellen.

Lois thought this a very witty remark and she laughed merrily.

"Perhaps the ghost and the burglar will come at the same time, and the ghost will frighten the burglar away," she suggested.

"I believe your mother was right about to-day being a weather-breeder," said Ellen, as she closed the blinds; "it has clouded over and there is n't a

star to be seen. I tell you what let 's do," she added, as she blew out the lamp and joined Lois in the wide, old-fashioned bed: "let 's talk until midnight, just for the fun of it."

"Oh, Ellen," Lois replied sleepily, "I don't think I could."

"Well, you need n't, then," said Ellen stiffly. "I know Ethel Smith would be just delighted to talk to me all night long, if I wished it."

At the mention of this name Lois rubbed her eyes and said drowsily, "All right, Ellen, what do you want to talk about?"

"Ghosts and burglars."

"I don't believe in ghosts, do you?" Lois asked.

"Well, they are very interesting to talk about, anyway," said Ellen non-committally.

After all, Ellen was the first to go to sleep, for her tales were so exciting that Lois soon became very wide awake; but long before midnight she too was peacefully slumbering, dropping off to the accompaniment of the rain that was beginning to fall on the tin roof of the piazza.

It seemed to her that she had been sleeping a long time when she was waked by the slamming of a blind. The wind was blowing a gale and the rain was falling in torrents. There were all sorts

of strange creaking, tapping, rattling noises, and although she was sure it was only the wind, she could not but think of Ellen's tales. How the house shook! and what a noise the brook made as it rushed downhill! The boards of the floor creaked as if some one were walking over them. Surely that must be a footstep! There certainly was some one in the room, and remembering Ellen's burglar, Lois gave her friend a violent shake.

"What's the matter?" Ellen cried in a sleepy, but cross voice.

"Listen, Ellen."

Ellen gripped Lois's hand.

Through the surrounding darkness they could catch the glimmer of a white form.

"It is a ghost," Ellen said in an awestruck voice; and Lois, who did not believe in ghosts, wished ardently that it was morning. Ellen held Lois's hand as if it were in a vice.

The white object moved stealthily towards the window.

Suddenly Ellen remembered that her father was in the next room.

"Father, father!" she called.

Then the ghost came towards them and said in Mr. Morgan's comfortable voice, "I am sorry I

waked you up. It is such a storm I was afraid the rain might be coming in at your east windows."

Ellen laughed hysterically.

"We thought you were a ghost, father," she said.

"Or a burglar," added Lois.

"I am sorry to disappoint you," said Mr. Morgan.

CHAPTER VI

THE STORM AT HOLLISFORD

THE oldest inhabitant could not remember so severe a storm in July as the one that followed Mrs. Page's weather-breeder. Ellen, who liked adventures, was delighted to find, when she waked in the morning, that it was raining very hard.

She ran to a window and opened the blinds.

"Look, Lois!" she cried; "see how the brook has risen already; it is almost up to the feather-bed!"

Lois came and looked. All her pretty, peaceful view of the night before was blurred by the down-coming rain.

In the dining-room the guests were all talking of the storm, as they ate their baked beans and fish-balls, and when church time approached, it was raining so hard that Mr. Morgan said he thought that the little girls had better stay at home.

"I have my raincoat and my rubbers," said Lois.

"Of course we are going to church," said Ellen, who longed to be out in the storm.

"Well, if the landlady can lend you a waterproof," Mr. Morgan began.

Lois put on her rubbers joyfully.

"I think you are very selfish," said Ellen, with a gleam of mischief in her eye that was lost on Lois, "to have two rubbers and never offer me one."

Lois pulled one off hastily.

Ellen laughed. "Goosie, what good would one rubber do either of us?" she said.

"Of course it would n't. I never stopped to think."

"Ellen, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to tease her so," said Ellen's father.

The landlady was not anxious to brave the storm, and cheerfully lent Ellen an old-fashioned blue circular waterproof, that swept the ground; but when it was pinned up with safety-pins and Ellen's feet were encased in rubbers far too large for her, the little company set out for church. The children were glad that the services were to be held in a white meeting-house a quarter of a mile away, instead of in the brick one, as it meant a longer walk.

The church was very old, with galleries, and square pews with doors. They had the building almost to themselves, and Ellen selected a pew near the door.

"I have to sit so far forward at home that I want

to sit where I can see every one go in," she whispered to Lois. "Does n't it seem just as if we were keeping house in a dear little room?" she added presently, as she closed the pew door. Lois, who had been taught never to whisper in church, pretended not to hear. She sat up very straight with her hands folded.

It seemed strange to the children that the slender congregation was composed chiefly of the old or middle-aged, the very persons they would have supposed the storm would have kept at home.

There were only three children present besides themselves, and these were boys, who were marshaled in by a severe-looking lady. When the first hymn was given out, Ellen felt it her duty to sing as loud as possible, as there were so few to join in the singing, and she let out her voice in a way that astonished Lois, and caused a woman in the pew in front of them to turn around.

When Mr. Morgan began his sermon, Lois found, to her delight, that it was an old favorite of hers, a sermon upon looking on the bright side, which he preached the first Sunday she ever heard him.

Lois felt a great deal older than she had done then, and she was sure she was not half so apt to look on the dark side. Indeed, until Jessie had gone away

on her vacation, there had seldom been a dark side to look on. Dear, sunny Jessie, who always made light of any little trial. There never was any one half so sweet as Jessie.

When church was over, there was a temporary lull in the storm, and Ellen persuaded her father to take them on a little walk across the bridge and up the hill. Ellen walked into every puddle they came to. She said that her rubbers were boats, and that it was her duty to give them a sail whenever she could.

“Ellen, I wish your sense of duty was not quite so strong,” said her father.

When they came back, they stood for a long time on the bridge throwing in sticks and watching them sail out on the other side. Ellen had a name for every vessel.

“Come, children, we really must go home,” said Mr. Morgan, cutting into a description that Ellen was giving of the crew of the Shooting Star. “It is beginning to rain hard again.”

After their walk the children were very hungry. Lois was beginning to feel quite at home at the long table. Both she and Ellen were delighted to find that there was roast chicken for dinner, with the accompaniment of mashed potatoes, peas, string beans, and jelly: each vegetable was on a separate



HER RUBBERS WERE BOATS

little dish. There were four kinds of dessert, apple pie, raspberry tart, custard pie, and tapioca pudding. Again the maid came to Lois first, and it was very hard to decide what to take, but she finally chose raspberry tart and apple pie. The apple pie was made of dried apples, which was a sad disappointment.

Ellen saw that her father was absorbed in a conversation with the man next to him, and she seized the opportunity to order all four kinds of dessert. "Does n't it seem just like Thanksgiving?" she whispered to Lois.

Ellen was eating her raspberry tart when her father unexpectedly turned and said to the maid, who was waiting for his order, "I see that my little girl has saved me the trouble of ordering any dessert," and he pushed the tapioca pudding and the custard pie towards him, and said, "That was very thoughtful of you, Ellen."

"I never can get ahead of father," Ellen said in a resigned voice.

It rained hard all the afternoon. When they were tired of reading, Lois and Ellen went out to the barn to see some kittens. There were five of them, and they were an exceedingly riotous family, and so little used to people that they would not come near the children. They looked very fascinating as they

peered at Lois and Ellen from distant corners. The mother was very friendly. She was something like Minnie, only she had yellow streaks in her fur. Two of the kittens looked like her, two were black and white, and the prettiest one was yellow and white. "How nice it is for the cat to have five kittens!" said Lois. "It is so lonely for Minnie and Mittens, now that Chinchilla has been given away." Lois was sure she could make friends with them in time. The landlady gave her some milk in a pie-plate, which she put down on the barn floor. The cat at once began to drink, and made the low call to her kittens that Lois knew so well. Presently, to Lois's delight, the kittens came scurrying from different quarters, and there was a family group around the pie-plate of a mother and her five children.

This excitement made a break in the long Sunday afternoon, and towards tea-time Mr. Morgan took the children for another walk in the rain.

The next morning it was still raining. The brook had become a raging torrent, and the feather-bed had been taken in at last. It was all very well for it to have rained on Sunday, but they had planned to have a day out of doors exploring the country on Monday, and the children were not at all pleased to find such a wet day.

How hard it poured ! There seemed no prospect of its ever clearing. Lois and Ellen pressed their noses against the window-pane at intervals, but there was no exploring to be done on this day.

After breakfast Lois thought it would help and please the landlady if they made their bed.

It was not an easy one to make, for there was an old-fashioned feather-bed on top, and punch and pull it as they would, they could not get it into shape.

"It is like kneading bread," said Ellen, "only it never seems to get kneaded."

When the bed was made it presented a strange appearance, for it stood up like a mountain in the middle and sloped away in an amazing fashion at each side.

"Good-morning," said the landlady pleasantly, as she came in with clean towels. "For the land's sake !" She stood as if petrified for a moment, and then said, "Who made that bed ? Did Delia make it ? I must give her a scolding."

"We made it. We wanted to help you," Lois faltered.

"Well, the next time you want to help, you had better take a few lessons in putting on feather-beds first. I guess you don't have them where you live."

"No; I wish we did," said Ellen, "they are so downy and comfortable."

The landlady pulled the bed to pieces, and Lois had a discouraged feeling. She thought she had been of so much help.

Afterwards Mr. Morgan read to them from "Ivanhoe," and they were so thrilled over the trials of Rebecca that they forgot they had wanted the sunshine.

Mr. Morgan had to get home by Tuesday noon, so when the sun finally came out the next morning, there was no time to do any exploring of the neighboring country.

The drive home was an adventurous one, for a pond had risen so that it spread over the road, and as they drove along, the water came up almost to the steps of the carriage. But this was not all: when they reached the hill where they had seen the three cats in the window, they found the road was badly gullied. Mr. Morgan drew up his horse, and Lois looked with dismay into the yawning chasm in front of them. A great slice had been taken off the hill, and the road was impassable.

"What shall we do, father?" Ellen asked. Any sort of an adventure delighted her. "Shall we scramble down into that hole and then climb up on

the other side?" She did not wait for an answer, but plunged into the abyss, while Lois stood cautiously on the edge.

"I shall have to lead the horse around through that field," said Mr. Morgan.

"And you want us to let down those bars for you," said Ellen, scrambling up again with the mud clinging to her shoes and skirt. "That is a cave, and there is an enchanted princess in it who has been turned into a stone," she informed Lois. "You ought to go down. It is most interesting."

"I don't care to get my shoes muddy," said Lois.

It was so exciting to drive through the rocky pasture that the rest of the journey was commonplace in comparison.

No European traveler, returning to his native land, could have had a greater sense of having had adventures and seen the world than Lois had, as she went up the steps and opened the green door of her house. Was it possible that it was only three days since she had left her quiet home?

"Well, dearest, did you have a good time?" her mother asked.

"We had such a good time, mother, and so many adventures!"

“What were they, dear?”

And then the hopelessness of ever describing them came over Lois. How could she make her mother know the charm of that glorious drive in the summer sunshine, or understand the excitement of life in the little hotel, or feel the terror of the midnight burglar-ghost, the quaint charm of the old church, and the rapture of the walk in the rain? How could she make her feel that it was all doubly dear to her because shared with Ellen and Ellen's father?

“I am sorry it rained so much of the time,” said Mrs. Page; “it must have been a great disappointment; but isn't it fortunate I put in your rubbers and raincoat?”

CHAPTER VII

THE VEGETABLE TEA-PARTY

SCHOOL began on the Monday after Labor Day, and so Jessie came back in time for Lois's birthday. Lois was delighted to see her, although she and Ellen had had such a good time together that she had not missed Jessie half so much as she thought she should. One morning at school Ellen said, "The vegetables are ripe in Anne's and my garden, and mother says I can ask you and Jessie to tea on your birthday."

"What a lovely thing it is to have a witch kitchen in the house!" Lois exclaimed enthusiastically. "I am sure that is why the vegetables got ripe just in time for my birthday."

"Of course," said Ellen.

Jessie and Lois could hardly wait for the afternoon of the party, and when it finally came, it was such a warm, pleasant day that to their great joy they could wear their white muslin dresses.

"Don't you feel very old?" asked Ellen, as she greeted Lois and gave her as many kisses as her years demanded.

"No," Lois answered, "I suppose I ought to, but I don't."

She felt very young and shy when she sat down at the supper-table and found herself placed, as the guest of honor, between Mr. Morgan and the formidable Amyas. He had grown very tall in the last year, and seemed much older than in the winter.

The table presented a unique appearance. In the middle was placed a dish of melons, cut in halves, while at the corners of the centrepiece, on which the dish stood, were small tumblers of radishes, and in front of Mr. Morgan was a delicious-looking salad, made of cucumbers and lettuce, with a cucumber vine encircling the dish.

"I arranged the table myself," Ellen burst out. "Don't you think it looks perfectly lovely?"

Lois had hardly tasted the first mouthful of her salad when the maid came to her with a letter.

"For me?" cried Lois. "How strange."

"Some one must have heard you were here," Amyas suggested.

Lois opened the envelope and found a pink ribbon inside, which just matched the sash she wore. There were also some lines, which ran as follows:—

Here is a ribbon for your hair,
Pray take it, dear, and place it there.
May joy and pleasure come to you,
So hopes your very loving

SUE.

Lois looked across the table at Ellen's grown-up sister and smiled her thanks. She was delighted with the ribbon and almost as much pleased with the verse.

"How nice it must be to be able to write poetry!" she shyly confided to Amyas.

"Poetry! do you call that stuff poetry?" he asked. "If I only had a name that would rhyme with anything, I could make much better poetry for you. I'll make some that will rhyme with your name," and a little later he broke a momentary silence by repeating, —

"There was a child named Lois Page,
Who 'd reached so very great an age,
She felt that dolls were surely folly,
And thus she was most melancholy ;
For dolls she loved with all her heart,
And from her dolls she could not part.
Poor little girl, poor Lois Page,
'T is sad to reach so great an age."

"I shan't be too old to play with dolls for a very long time," Lois stated.

"I am glad of that," said Amyas, "for I have a small present. Where is it?"—he felt in his pocket—"oh, here it is; I bought it for myself, and when I tried it on, mother insisted it was too small for me. What do you think, Lois?"

He gravely put on a doll's hat, which was just the right size for Lois's Betty. It was made of white straw and was trimmed with a blue ribbon, and a small feather was stuck in it.

Amyas looked so absurd with the tiny hat perched on top of his yellow hair that every one burst out laughing.

"Don't you think it is becoming?" Amyas inquired, with a smirk and the conscious look in his blue eyes of an affected young lady. "Isn't it provoking of mother to say it is too small? If you like it for one of your dolls, you can have it," he said, presenting it to her with a piece of paper on which was written the verse he had just quoted.

"Oh, thank you so much," said Lois.

"I bought it for Amyas," Ellen said. "I took down Jean because she is just the size of Betty and fitted her, and I was so crazy to keep the hat myself that Amyas gave me one too, so Jean and Betty will have hats just alike."

"Ellen is always fond of romancing," said Amyas.

While Lois was still eating her salad the maid again brought her something. This time it was a bunch of sweet peas of variegated colors, and they were separated by a feathery green, so that they looked almost as if they were growing on the vines. Lois plunged her nose into them and inhaled the delicious fragrance. A card said, "For Lois, with best wishes for a happy new year, from S. T. Morgan."

"I can't write verses," said Mrs. Morgan, "but I picked these sweet peas for you, Lois, with my own hands."

The next gift was a tiny little box full of cotillon pencils of different colors. There was a verse with them that ran: —

Five pencils in their narrow bed,
Yellow and green, blue, pink, and red.
Oh, may these colors symbolize
Woods and sunshine and bluest skies.
Rainbows, sunsets, red letter days,
And all life's gay and pleasant ways.
May every year of added age
Bring added joy to Lois Page.

This was Mr. Morgan's contribution, and it seemed to Lois the sweetest poem of all.

There were rolls and cold chicken with the salad, and when this course was finished, the melons were passed around with some cake with cocoanut frost-

ing. Lois was beginning to think she was not going to have any more presents when the maid handed her another envelope. Inside was a charming hand-painted paper doll made by Anne, and these lines were written in Anne's clear hand:—

Here is a maiden with a fan,
Dressed by your very loving

ANNE.

Lois was delighted. The poetic gift of the Morgan family filled her with amazement.

"Anne painted in the fan on account of the rhyme," Ellen confided to the company. "We had such fun, all writing the verses together the other night, only mother and Reuben can never write any. I am crazy to have you hear my poem."

Presently a very large bundle was placed on the table near Lois, and she began to open it eagerly. She undid one wrapping-paper after another, until finally she came to a moderate sized candy box.

"Candy; how nice!" said Lois, looking appreciatively at Ellen.

"I hope it will be your favorite kind," said Ellen. "Guess what it is."

"Chocolate peppermints," said Lois.

She opened the cover, pulled up the paraffine paper, and underneath were disclosed two small cucumbers.

The disappointment was so great that Lois at first could not appreciate the joke. Ellen's verse was written in her scrawling hand.

Dear Lois, in your birthnight slumbers,
I hope you 'll dream of my cucumbers ;
Of melon, monkey, and hand-organ,
So hopes your best friend,

ELLEN MORGAN.

"Amyas bet me a doll's hat that I could n't make a verse with a rhyme in it to my own name, but I did," said Ellen triumphantly.

There was only one more present, a small box of chocolate peppermints from Reuben. There was no verse with it, only, "Lois from Reuben," in Mrs. Morgan's attractive handwriting. Reuben was down at the other end of the table next his mother, and Lois could not get enough courage to thank him. She would wait until after supper. Reuben was even shyer than she was ; he was a little older than Lois, and did not have the charm of his older brother. Nevertheless, Reuben had been very kind to her when she had stayed with the Morgans in the winter, having taught her to skate, and yet she never saw him now without relapsing into her old fear of him, he was so silent and was apt to look so indifferent.

It happened that Reuben did not sit near Lois in

the games they played after supper, so she had no chance to thank him for his present. Mrs. Morgan had said that one of the boys would see the children home, and Lois thought if it were Reuben, she would gather courage to thank him then, but it proved to be Mr. Morgan who walked back with them. Amyas came out to the front door politely, but Reuben was nowhere to be seen.

Her pleasure in Reuben's gift had been spoiled by the fact that the inscription had been in his mother's writing. Lois was sure he had not bought the candy for her himself, but that Mrs. Morgan had felt it would seem rude if each member of the family were not represented.

"Mother, we had such a lovely time!" Lois said when they reached home. "I had seven presents and five poems," and she proceeded to show her treasures, and to give an animated account of the evening.

Mrs. Page was most sympathetic.

"Mother, you don't think it is any matter if I don't thank Reuben, do you?" Lois asked. "I am sure it was really his mother's present."

"I don't think so," said Jessie. "I am sure it was only that he was ashamed of his bad handwriting."

"Well, at any rate, it is only polite to thank

him," said Mrs. Page, entirely unaware of what a desperate task she was setting her daughter.

"Of course you ought to," said Jessie, who would not in the least have minded thanking a schoolful of children.

"I shall have to thank Reuben to-day," Lois thought the next morning, and this reflection was such a weight at her heart that the glorious September sunshine seemed clouded. When Lois reached school and saw Reuben come in, her heart began to beat very fast. He had a stolid expression, and when recess came he went out immediately. As the day wore on, it seemed more and more impossible to thank him, and when two unhappy days had dragged themselves by, poor Lois felt that she would gladly have foregone all the glories of her birthday, if by this means she could escape thanking this member of the Morgan family for his gift.

"I must do it," she thought. "Mother said so, and it is rude not to, but it does not seem as if I could."

The longer she put it off, the harder it was. On Saturday Lois and Jessie went to the Morgans' to play croquet with Anne and Ellen, and while they were in the midst of a game Reuben appeared, asking some question about his tennis racquet.

“Now,” thought Lois, “I must do it,” but he was off again like a flash before the words left her lips.

On Monday morning, when she and Jessie came out at recess, she saw Reuben and his great friends, Joel Carpenter and Jack Brown, on the steps of the Baptist meeting-house, which was next to the school-house. They were deep in conversation, evidently discussing some plan. Without giving herself time to think, Lois left Jessie and went forward quickly. The boys were standing on the third step, and so were just above her. Claspings her hands behind her and with upturned face, she said hurriedly, —

“Reuben, I thank you very much for my birthday present.”

Then she hastily turned her back on him and fled.

“Gee!” burst from Joel Carpenter’s lips, as Lois hurried down the street.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TREE THAT GREW IN THE PAGES' GARDEN

WHENEVER anything pleasant happened, the children always pretended that it was owing to the witch kitten, but in the case of the darning-class there was no need of making believe, for even such an incredulous on-looker as Mrs. Page acknowledged that Mittens was the cause of their good fortune. Lois and Jessie and Anne and Ellen made up between them a short account of the affair modeled on "The House that Jack Built."

This is the tree that grew in the Pages' garden.

This is the witch cat that climbed the tree that grew in the Pages' garden.

This is the dog that barked at the witch cat that climbed the tree that grew in the Pages' garden.

This is the maid in a lilac gown that chased the dog, with an awful frown, that barked at the witch cat that climbed the tree that grew in the Pages' garden.

This is the rent that came in the gown of the dainty maid with the awful frown who chased the dog that barked at the witch cat that climbed the tree that grew in the Pages' garden.

This is the dame in the ancient town who mended the rent in the lilac gown of the dainty maid with the awful frown who chased the dog that barked at the witch cat that climbed the tree that grew in the Pages' garden.

This was what happened. Lois and Jessie were weeding their flower-beds, and Minnie and Mittens were frisking about them, unconscious of approaching evil. They were just behind the children, when a large brown and white spaniel came into the garden. The little girls were intent on their weeding, and did not notice his approach, when suddenly a series of loud barks and terrified mews caused them to turn hastily. Lois saw a picture that made her heart stand still. Minnie, with her back up, was rushing valiantly towards the intruder.

"Oh, Jessie, Minnie will be killed!" cried Lois. "Minnie, Minnie darling, come to me!"

Meanwhile Mittens was seeking the safety of a neighboring tree. He was so young that he was not sure that dogs could not climb, and so he went up as high as he could get and sat on a slender branch, huddled together in a forlorn little heap, a most abject and frightened kitten.

Lois stood petrified, but Jessie instantly ran between the dog and the cat.

"Don't, Jessie!" exclaimed Lois, even more afraid

for the safety of her friend than for that of her pets. "He may bite you."

The dog was still growling ; he was just preparing to make another dash at the cat, who, on her side, was about to spring at his head.

Jessie swooped down on Minnie and deposited the struggling animal in the cat-house, shutting her in ; then she turned to bend her energies to getting rid of the dog. Finding that he was balked of his prey, he now took up his station at the foot of the apple-tree where Mittens had taken refuge, and gave a series of low growls. Poor Mittens answered by piercing mews.

"Come, poor fellow, come, good dog," said Jessie.

"He is a bad dog," said Lois energetically. She was still at a safe distance, but came a few steps nearer as she spoke. "I think he intends to stay all night," she continued. "What shall we do ? Poor Mittens will die of fright, and just hear what a dreadful noise Minnie is making."

Minnie was walking about on the window-sill of the cat-house like a raging tiger, furious at having been deprived of her fight.

"The only thing is to try kindness," said Jessie. "Good dog, poor doggie, good dog."

"He is a bad dog," Lois repeated. She had once more retired to a safe distance.

"Do keep still, Lois ; he does n't mean to be bad any more than Minnie does. I wish I had something for him to eat."

At this moment the kitten climbed a little higher, and the shaking of the branch sent a rosy astrachan apple to the ground.

"How stupid I was !" said Jessie. "We had a spaniel once that loved apples." She picked one up from the ground, bit out a piece, and held it before him enticingly. A change came over him, and he slowly followed her as she moved back a few paces. He turned, however, irresolutely, to look at the tree. "Good dog, good dog," Jessie said soothingly. Finally she succeeded in wholly distracting his attention from the kitten. She moved slowly back until she got him outside the yard. Then she gave him the piece of apple.

Meanwhile the dog's master was looking for him, and the spaniel joined him and went off down the street.

When Jessie returned to Mittens she said, "Now it is perfectly safe, you can come down, dear."

Poor Mittens looked at her as if he would say, "I would come down if I could." Fright had made him

climb higher than he had ever climbed before, but it was one thing to climb up and quite another to come down.

The children looked at each other.

"He can't come down," Lois said. "What are we to do now? We'll have to get Joe Mills to bring a ladder and get him down," she added presently.

"Joe Mills is working at the Browns' to-day. It will be nearly six o'clock when he comes by. Mittens will be almost out of his mind with fright before that. I can get him down all right."

"But he is on such a small branch," Lois objected. "You can never climb up to him, the branch won't bear you."

Jessie's only answer was to begin to climb the tree. She went up as high as she could, but the kitten was some distance above her head.

"Mittens, come down, Mittens," she called caressingly. The kitten made a feeble movement. Jessie reached up with one hand. Mittens came cautiously down a little way and Jessie caught him. The branch she was on was hardly strong enough to bear her weight. It began to show signs of breaking. Jessie hastily put the kitten on her shoulder so that she could use her two hands, but in scrambling

down her foot slipped, and she and Mittens fell in a heap on the ground.

"Are you hurt?" Lois asked anxiously.

"No, we are all right, aren't we, Mittens? Only I have torn my frock," and she looked ruefully at a large tear in her skirt.

"Oh, how too bad!" said Lois, "and that is such a pretty dress."

"I wish I knew how to darn," said Jessie. "I have made such a lot of trouble for your mother. Now you never tear your clothes."

"But I don't do such interesting things. I'm not brave like you."

"I hate to tell your mother," said Jessie.

"Oh, mother won't mind. She'll just say, 'How could you be so careless!' and then she'll mend your skirt so beautifully you'll hardly know it was torn."

"Yes, but she has had to mend so many things for me already," sighed Jessie.

At this moment they saw a carriage drive up to the gate, and Mrs. Draper got out and came along the brick walk to the front door.

Mrs. Draper was old enough to be Mrs. Page's mother, but in spite of that fact she was one of Lois's best friends. She ran up to her now.

"Mother isn't in ; she'll be so sorry to miss you !" she said.

"I will stop and see you and Jessie," said Mrs. Draper, signing to her coachman to drive on. "Let me come out into the garden, it is a perfect day to stay out of doors."

"Mrs. Draper, I am not fit to be seen," said Jessie. "I've torn this dreadful hole in my dress."

"She has saved the life of our witch cat," Lois explained, and she gave Mrs. Draper an account of the incident that lost nothing in the telling.

"I am sorry I was so careless," said Jessie. "I am always tearing my clothes. I am so sorry for Aunt Elizabeth !"

"Now if there is one thing that I can do well, it is darning," said Mrs. Draper. "I used to darn the stockings and the clothes for a large family before I was married. Bring the dress over to my house, Jessie, and I will promise to make it look almost as well as if Mrs. Page did it. We won't tell her anything about it until it is mended."

"Oh, Mrs. Draper, how kind you are ! I could n't let you do it. Could n't you show me how ? I ought to learn to darn, if I am going to be so careless. You see at home there was always Marie to do the

washing and sewing, and I am afraid I never thought about how much work I was making."

Mrs. Draper sat down on the bench in the garden near the children's flower-beds. Lois thought how very lovely she looked in her gray gown and hat that so perfectly harmonized with her gray hair.

"I am afraid it would take you some time to learn," she said, "so I will mend this especial frock; but if you would really like to know how to darn your clothes and your stockings, I shall be delighted to teach you." She saw Lois's wistful, pleading face, and added, "and you too, of course, Lois dear, and perhaps Anne and Ellen Morgan would like to join us. I will read aloud to you while you are at work."

"Oh, Mrs. Draper, that would be perfectly lovely," cried Lois, "if mother lets us, and I am sure she will."

"How well your nasturtiums have lasted!" said Mrs. Draper, "and the cosmos is beautiful, and what a fine scarlet geranium that is! But what is that vine in the middle of each bed? Oh, I see, it is a cucumber vine, and there are cucumbers on it. I did not see them at first. What an original idea, but it is really quite ornamental."

"It is n't Ellen's fault that there are n't melons

and squashes too," said Lois, and she told the whole story.

Mrs. Draper laughed heartily at Ellen's prank.

"I never knew any one so lucky as I am," Jessie said to Lois as they went to bed that night. "Most children would get a dreadful scolding for tearing their clothes, and here I am having my dress mended by Mrs. Draper, and we are to have this lovely darn-ing-class."

"It is a fortunate thing to own a witch kitten," said Lois.

CHAPTER IX

MRS. DRAPER'S DARNING-CLASS

A FEW days later, the Drapers' coachman brought two square envelopes to the house. Lois found, to her delight, that one was directed to herself and the other to Jessie. They opened them eagerly. Inside was a correspondence card with the monogram C. L. D. in silver letters at the top. On each card was written, —

MRS. HENRY DRAPER

BEGS THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY

NEXT SATURDAY, FROM HALF PAST TWO UNTIL HALF

PAST THREE, FOR THE FIRST MEETING

OF THE DARNING-CLASS.

Please bring a stocking with a hole in it.

There was some difficulty in getting the stockings, for Mrs. Page had already done the weekly mending, but she finally suggested that Mrs. Morgan could easily provide enough for all of them, and this proved to be the case. The four children met outside the Drapers' gate. Anne was more than a year older than Jessie, but she was only a little taller, as Jessie

was large for her age. Anne was a very beautiful girl, with curly golden hair and blue eyes. She and Jessie put their arms around each other's waists, and so did Lois and Ellen. Ellen carried a brown plaid Boston bag that had grown shabby from long service.

"Is n't this a hideous old thing?" she asked. "Mother says it is good enough to last for years. I hate Boston bags! It has four stockings in it, — one of Anne's, and one of mine, and one of Amyas's, and one of Reuben's. I am going to mend Amyas's, for it is so much more interesting to mend somebody else's things, and besides, the hole is a small one, and Anne will mend Reuben's, and you can mend mine, and Jessie, Anne's. Won't you just love to mend my stocking for me?"

"That depends on the kind of a hole it has," said Lois unsentimentally.

"You ought n't to mind a little thing like that. You ought to be just crazy to do anything for me. Gertrude Brown would be perfectly thrilled to have a chance to mend my stocking."

They were going up the Drapers' avenue as she spoke, and presently reached the front door, which was opened by the neat maid in a white cap.

"I used to be so scared last year when I came to

this house," Lois confided to Ellen, "but now I don't mind at all."

"How prompt you are!" said Mrs. Draper, coming forward to meet them. "It is so warm to-day that I think it will be pleasant out on the piazza," and she led the way through the large hall hung with portraits of Drapers in the clothes of a past century.

The piazza was at the back of the house, and was glassed in later in the season. It was large and square like a room, and contained a sofa and a table and a variety of comfortable chairs, all of green wicker-work. From the piazza they could look into the Drapers' beautiful old-fashioned garden. It was a little too late for many flowers, but there were chrysanthemums of all kinds and colors still in blossom, besides dahlias and cosmos. The yellows and dull reds of the chrysanthemums and dahlias pleased the children's color-loving eyes.

They all stood until Mrs. Draper had seated herself in one of the armchairs, and then Anne and Jessie slipped into seats near her, while Ellen and Lois took their places on the green wicker sofa, that they might be as close together as possible. On the table there was a dainty bag of white cretonne, with heliotrope fleur-de-lis on it. It was a large bag and

held Mrs. Draper's darning-materials. Ellen clutched her brown plaid Boston bag, and hastily slipped it down on the floor on the other side of the sofa.

Mrs. Draper took four wooden eggs out of her bag and gave one to each of the class.

"Now if you will give me your stockings, I will show you how to go to work," she said.

Ellen stooped to unfasten her bag, and in pulling out the stockings she sent her thimble and Anne's flying across the piazza floor.

When they were all at work, the four little girls looked very business-like as each one sat with an egg in her stocking, which disclosed the hole in all the roughness of its outline. Anne's hole, which fell to Jessie's share, was a delicate and lady-like one compared with the sturdy hole in Reuben's sock which Anne was placidly mending, and the enormous one in Ellen's stocking with which poor Lois was contending.

Mrs. Draper showed them how to draw the hole up around the edge, and then to put the threads in up and down, and after that to cross them with other threads, which they wove in and out like a basket pattern, reminding Jessie of the weaving she had learned years ago at kindergarten.

"I am going to give a prize to the one who does

the best work," said Mrs. Draper, and Ellen, who had felt that it didn't matter very much whether she was careful or not, so long as it was Amyas's sock she was mending, began to pull out her work.

When they were all well under way, Mrs. Draper took from the table a book bound in black and gold.

"I am going to read to you from 'The Lady of the Lake,'" said Mrs. Draper. "This is the very book from which I read when I had a similar darning-class for my nieces, forty years ago."

Lois felt very proud when she had the preliminary part of her darning done, and had put in all the threads that went up and down.

"It looks like a harp with a thousand strings," whispered Ellen.

"I shall give only a small prize to-day," said Mrs. Draper. "I have some sheets of gold and silver paper and some tissue paper of different colors that I thought perhaps you could use for paper-doll dresses."

The children's eyes gleamed with pleasure.

"But after three lessons I am going to give the pupil who has improved the most, this," and Mrs. Draper took out of her bag an emery made in the shape of a strawberry. The children all thought it very beautiful, for besides being of such a pretty shape

and color, it had a silver top. "This is to be the second prize at the end of three weeks," and Mrs. Draper held up a little needle-book covered with white silk that had a pattern of pink rosebuds and green leaves on it. She untied the pink ribbons and showed some darning-needles and embroidery needles inside.

"I think the second prize is the nicest," said Ellen.

"Well, the most promising pupil can choose which she likes best," said Mrs. Draper.

In the middle of the lesson they had a recess; the maid brought out a tray, and on it were five glasses of lemonade, and some very thin, delicate ginger cookies.

"This is what I always used to have for my nieces, forty years ago," said Mrs. Draper, with a gentle little sigh.

"I am so glad you did!" said Ellen.

As the end of the hour approached, Mrs. Draper brought out the gold and silver sheets and the tissue paper. There were sheets of nearly all the colors of the rainbow, green, blue, yellow, red, and also pink and gray. Lois longed more and more to have those beautiful sheets of paper for her very own. She tried hard to make her hole look neat, but it was larger than any of the others, even than the one Anne was

darning, and Anne was so much older and quicker with her fingers that Lois despaired of equaling her. Mrs. Draper took the four stockings, when they were finished, and looked at them critically.

“That is not bad for a first attempt,” she said, holding up Anne’s, “but even that is far from the work I hope you will all do some time. There is no doubt but that the first prize goes to Anne. I am going to have a second prize, however, for the one who darned the largest hole, so, Lois, you will have some of this paper.”

She divided the sheets into two portions, as she spoke, giving twice as many to Anne as to Lois.

“Now next Saturday,” she said, “I am going to give out the stockings myself, and let Ellen have the largest hole to mend, because she has had the smallest to-day, and Lois will have the smallest. Don’t you think this is only fair?”

“Yes, I do,” Ellen admitted, hanging her head.

CHAPTER X

A RED LETTER DAY

AFTER this, the darning-class became the chief feature in the week, and the children were sure never to miss a lesson. The book grew more and more interesting, and so did the darning, as they learned to be less clumsy with their needles; and when the third Saturday came, the little girls were most eager to know who were to have the prizes. Anne was still the best worker, but Ellen had high hopes of getting the first prize, because she had improved so much.

"She said, you know, the one who had improved the most was to get it," Ellen remarked to Lois, as they were walking, arm in arm, up the Drapers' avenue. "Now my work was perfectly horrid at first, and I do it a lot better now."

"So do I," said Lois. Lois had no hope of getting the first prize, as she could see that Anne and Jessie were better workers than she, but she had a faint hope that her marked improvement would entitle her to the second.

"Anne and Jessie are so much older than we are that I don't think it is fair," said Ellen.

"Isn't it fun that we are really to have the prizes given to-day?" said Lois. "I think this is a red letter day." This expression, which she had met for the first time in Mr. Morgan's verse, had fascinated her.

"I don't think it will be unless we get a prize," said Ellen.

It was a very exciting meeting, for the two prizes were in full view while they worked, and the strawberry had never looked so red and enticing, and the little needle-book seemed daintier than ever. They could now darn more than one hole in the hour, and their weekly meeting was a real godsend to Mrs. Morgan and Mrs. Page. The children were hard at work, bending over their stockings with flushed faces, when Judge Draper rushed out on the piazza like a large tornado, stumbling over Ellen's Boston bag, and catching at the sofa to prevent his falling.

"Connie, Leonard says it is going to rain to-morrow, and that the wind is playing the deuce in the hill orchard. I must get in the apples to-day. I've come to ask you to drive up there with me this afternoon."

"I told you I had an engagement," said Mrs. Draper, glancing at the children.

The judge looked at them as if they were of no more importance than flies, and could be as easily brushed aside.

"But I want you, do you understand? The apples must be picked this afternoon."

"And unfortunately I have an engagement." The more vehement he was, the quieter she became. "You don't need me to help you pick apples."

"But I want your company on the trip."

The children's hearts sank while this dialogue was going on. It was so hard to be in sight of the emery bag and the little needle-book, so aggravating to be within an hour of solving the great mystery as to whom they should belong, and then to have the decision postponed for a whole week. It would be a disappointment that would be almost unbearable.

"Come, Connie, there is no time to lose. We must start in a quarter of an hour."

"I am very sorry, children," began Mrs. Draper, "but you see the judge wants me to go so much." Just then a bright idea struck her. "Harry, why shouldn't we all go?" she asked. "The children could ride in the wagon with the barrels, and they could help pick the apples."

Suddenly the judge seemed to become aware that the little girls were not flies to be brushed aside, but human beings with desires and capacities. He saw four young faces, and three of them glanced up with different degrees of eager anticipation shining in their eyes. Ellen and Jessie looked as if they could hardly keep back an exclamation, while if Lois was more subdued, there was a wistful expression on her countenance that was almost more appealing. It was the "this-is-too-good-to-be-true, and-so-I-must-not-think-of-it" expression. Anne alone sat serene and quiet. It was Anne, however, who settled the fate of the others. She was so very pretty, as she sat there demurely looking down at her work, that the judge wanted to take her along with him, and he was also curious to see if it would be possible to ruffle that calm exterior.

"Children, I believe I will take you."

A chorus of exclamations followed. "Oh, Judge Draper, how perfectly lovely!" from Jessie. "How perfectly great!" from Ellen, and "Did n't I say it was going to be a red letter day?" in low tones from Lois. Anne alone said nothing, but she began quietly to fold up her work.

"I will take some of you, anyway," the judge went on, with a twinkle in his eye.

A sudden terrible suspense came over the company.

"Miss Anne, now, has n't said she wants to go, and perhaps it is too undignified a trip for her. Miss Anne, would you rather be left behind?"

"No, sir," said Anne, in her sweet, low voice. "I'd like to go very much, but there are lots of things I can do at home, if you haven't room for me."

"I guess there'll be room all right."

They all went home in a great hurry to get wraps; and the emery bag and the needle-book, once the envy of all eyes, were left on the table quite forgotten.

Mrs. Draper and the judge started on ahead in the buggy, leaving the four children to follow them.

It was great fun scrambling into the wagon, and Ellen immediately perched herself on top of a barrel.

"There are four barrels, one for each of us," she said gayly.

Jessie climbed in next and took her place on a barrel, but Lois hesitated. The barrel looked like a dizzy height to her, and the seat seemed very insecure.

"Come, Lois, jump in!" Ellen cried impatiently. Lois stood first on one foot and then on the other.

She did not dare to sit on the barrel, and neither did she dare to say that she was afraid.

"I am going to sit in front with Leonard," said Anne. "It will be ever so much more comfortable. Won't you sit there with me, Lois?"

And this was how it happened that as they drove through the village street there were two vacant seats in what Ellen named "the orchestra circle."

"Hullo! where are you going?" Reuben demanded, as he and Amyas passed the wagon.

"To pick apples in Judge Draper's orchard. Don't you want to come?" Ellen asked, with suspicious sweetness.

"You bet!"

"Well, you can't, you know, for you weren't invited to this theatre party."

"I guess we can get admission tickets at the door," he retorted, and he and Amyas swung themselves into the wagon without further ceremony.

Lois looked straight ahead, and did not once turn to speak to them. Ever since she had thanked Reuben for his present, she had crossed the street whenever she saw him approaching. The pleasure had all gone out of the trip for Lois. Why had those boys insisted upon coming to spoil the afternoon?

And here was Jessie evidently finding an added

zest in the occasion, for she greeted them most cordially and talked with the greatest ease.

Anne turned every now and then to put in a word, and Lois was the only silent member of the party.

"I wish I had stayed at home," she thought. "Nobody wants me. Nobody speaks to me."

They were all laughing and joking together, and she felt very dull and dumb.

It was a beautiful October afternoon. The sky was even more cloudless than when they had gone to Brierfield to gather mayflowers, and the world was quite as beautiful, in a different way. Color flashed at them all along the road. There were flaming scarlet sumachs, and yellow maples and red ones, and every now and then a solitary oak sedate in russet brown. Suddenly they came upon some blue gentians shyly looking up at them from the roadside. They were so exquisite with their fringed petals that Lois forgot herself and said, "Look at those beautiful gentians." Then, abashed by the sound of her voice, she was silent.

"Let's get out and pick some," said Ellen.

"They'll fade," said Anne; "we'd better wait until we are coming home."

The judge and Mrs. Draper were waiting in the orchard to receive their guests.

"Good Lord! Who invited you to come?" the judge asked, when he saw the boys.

"We invited ourselves, sir," said Amyas, with a pleasant smile. "We thought that 'Many hands make light work.'"

"Well, as you are here, you may as well stay, but I trust many mouths won't make light work."

They all began picking apples, but Lois stopped every now and then out of pure joy in the October sunshine and the splendor of the autumn coloring. At the foot of the hill the yellows and reds of the trees blended together softly, while in the apple orchard the bright red of the apples made many little spots of vivid color. Anne in her blue gown and white sweater looked very graceful as she raised her arm to pick the apples, and Ellen in her red sweater darted about the field sampling each tree, but never staying long anywhere.

"You look like a scarlet tanager, Ellen," said Lois.

"Do I? I would rather look like that than like a blue jay, like Anne."

Suddenly Lois gave a loud scream. A black snake had wriggled along the grass and placed himself just at her feet.

"What is the matter?" the others cried.

"It is a snake! I am so afraid of them!"

She felt disgraced in having given way to her fears, and yet she could not help it.

Anne, who was picking apples near Lois, ran back in fright, while Jessie and Ellen boldly came over with the boys to look at the snake.

"I think he's the poisonous kind," Jessie said. "We've had them at Brierfield."

Leonard, who was on the other side of the orchard, picked up a big stick, and started to come over; but Reuben, who always liked to be the leading spirit whenever there was anything to be done, dashed in ahead.

"I guess he's done for now," he said, as he gave the snake some blows with a stick. "You need n't be afraid of him any more," he added to Lois.

Lois still felt ashamed of having screamed. She wished she were brave, like Jessie and Ellen.

It seemed strange that Reuben should be so much nicer to her after she had screamed and he had killed the snake. She had supposed her silly terror would put the finishing touch to his contempt for her.

When they had picked all the apples on the low branches, it was proved a fortunate thing that the judge had brought so many children with him, for they climbed up into the higher branches and gathered the fruit that grew there.

"Come up here where I am, Lois; it's lot more fun," Ellen called out.

Lois climbed a little higher, but it made her feel dizzy to look down, so she clung to a branch, and said she would rather stay where she was.

"You are afraid of everything," said Ellen. "First you were afraid to sit on a barrel, and then you were afraid of the snake, and now you are afraid of an apple-tree."

"You shut up, Ellen Morgan," said Reuben. "If you were afraid of a few more things, you would be a lot pleasanter to live in the house with."

"So would you," Ellen returned. "I wish you were a little afraid of me, and then you would n't say such rude things."

Most of the time Mrs. Draper had been sitting on the carriage cushion, which the judge had taken out and put on the top of the stone wall. Now she went over to the carriage and took out a basket of provisions.

"I was going to have an extra feast to-day on account of giving the prizes," she said.

The prizes! Only a few hours before, the children had felt as if they could not live in peace without knowing who were to receive them, and not one of them had thought of the prizes since she left the

Drapers' house ; for life is full of variety, and the unexpected things that happen in each day make its charm.

They gathered around Mrs. Draper, and she took out, not only the customary wafer ginger cookies and a bottle of lemonade, but also some sandwiches and some nut cake.

"I did not know we were going to have quite such a large company when I put up the lunch," she said.

"Never mind," said Amyas, "I am sure Ellen will be perfectly delighted to give me her share."

After the feast was over, they went back to the apple-trees and picked apples until the sun went down into a bank of clouds almost as golden as he was himself. The red letter day was coming to an end ; but there is this peculiar charm about red letter days, that while other days fade into a blur of forgetfulness, the red letter days are ours forever ; and Lois would always remember the autumn foliage, the golden sunset, Jessie, Anne, and Ellen, as they flitted about the field, Mrs. Draper, the restful spot in the picture as she sat and watched them, and the handsome, graceful Amyas ; even the snake and Reuben's kindness would not be forgotten.

When they came to the gentians once more, as

they were driving downhill, Reuben jumped out of the wagon and began to pick some. He was quickly followed by Amyas.

"Get enough for me too, Reuben," Ellen called out.

"You can get some for yourself, if you want any," he returned ungraciously.

"I guess I will," and she sprang out of the wagon and joined them.

Reuben bunched his gentians together clumsily and held them out awkwardly to Lois without a word. "I must be sure to thank him," she thought. "Thank you very much. I am sorry you had so much trouble," she said shyly.

"That's no matter."

Amyas brought a bouquet of gentians, most daintily arranged, to Jessie, which he handed her with his accustomed grace. He then presented his sister Anne with another.

Lois looked down at the flowers in her lap. Anne's and Jessie's had a value which hers did not possess.

"I wish Amyas had given me some," she thought.

CHAPTER XI

GRANDMOTHER LOIS

LOIS's grandmother, for whom she was named, was coming to make the Pages a visit, and both Lois and her mother were looking forward to this event with secret misgivings. Lois tried to think that she was very fond of her grandmother, but for some reason she never felt comfortable in her presence, and the more she admired her stately figure and rapid flow of language, the more awkward and tongue-tied she felt herself to be. To begin with, her grandmother had made it very evident that she would have liked her much better if she had been a boy. As for Lois herself, she was only too thankful that she had escaped this fate, for boys and dogs were to her mind the dark blots in an otherwise fair world.

"Lois, I think you had better come to the train with me to meet your grandmother," said Mrs. Page, on the afternoon when their guest was to arrive.

"Jessie and I were going to the Morgans' to play croquet."

"You can go there afterwards."

"Jessie has a music lesson afterwards."

"Well, I am sorry for your disappointment, but I would like to have you come with me."

The train was nearly an hour late, and Lois's patience was almost exhausted.

"If we had only known it was going to be late, I could have gone to the Morgans'," she said, over and over, until her mother felt like saying, "I am sure I wish that you had."

At last the train steamed into the station, and Mrs. Page went forward as the passengers began to get out. Among the first was an alert-looking lady, a little past fifty, wearing a well-made black suit and a black hat with ostrich plumes.

"I am sorry your train is so late," said Mrs. Page, as she shook hands with her mother-in-law. "Come, Lois, take your grandmother's bag."

Lois, who had hold of her mother's hand, and was hanging back in the vain hope of escaping observation, now had to come forward.

"Bless me! How Lois has grown! She is large for her age, and how she looks like her father around the eyes! She is an out-and-out Page."

Lois was not sure whether this was meant as a compliment.

“There is a hack over here,” said Mrs. Page.
“Will you give me your check?”

“Here it is. I would rather walk.”

“They don’t charge anything extra for passengers, so you might as well ride.”

“If that is not New Hampshire all over! It is just as cheap for me to do something I don’t want to do, and so you propose that I should ride in that stuffy hack, so as to get the full value of twenty-five cents.”

“Oh, if you would rather walk, we will,” said Mrs. Page, a little disconcerted. “Only it seems so inhospitable.”

“What a quaint little town it is,” said the elder Mrs. Page, as they walked up the village street. “I used to tell my husband I could stay away twenty years, and not one hair would have changed on anybody’s head. I am sure those are the same bony horses of my youth, that are tied around the paling of the common. Look at that eccentric old fellow in arctics! Is he preparing for a snowstorm?”

“That is Captain Taft, Sophie Brown’s father. He can’t find anything else that is comfortable for his feet.”

“Well, I like his independence. I suppose if he had taken the trip up the Nile with us last winter, he

would have pursued his way calmly through Egypt in those things. They were planning to have a new block for Chauncey and the drug-store when I was here three years ago, but I see they haven't got around to it yet. I wonder if they have any dotted veiling at Chauncey's. When I was here last, they told me they had such a run on it that it was too much trouble to keep it in stock. I should think they might at least paint the building."

"It is a shabby-looking block," said Lois's mother.

"You need not apologize for it, my dear. We all know that if you owned that block it would be scrubbed to a point of painful neatness. I suppose your house is as immaculate as ever, and that every piece of furniture is in the same place. I always think of your house as the house where nothing happens, and, my dear, that is a great compliment. It is the house of rest, the house of standards and simple living. When I am tired with the strain of life, or of rushing around the world, I think of your house as of a haven of peace, and when I get to be an old lady, I am coming to spend a whole summer with you."

"That will be very nice," said Mrs. Page. "I don't know whether it would be polite of me to hope you will be an old lady soon."

“Elizabeth, it is never required of you to tell anything but the truth. You can’t tell polite fibs with a good grace. I know you are wondering when I shall consider myself old, and what on earth you would do with me for a whole summer. Why, that is Sophie Brown, isn’t it, and her little girl? How do you do, Sophie? I was glad to see your father looking so well. Is this Gertrude? How she has grown, and how much she looks like you!”

“What a plain child!” said the elder Mrs. Page, as they passed out of hearing. “And what a quantity of freckles she has! I know a wash which is good for freckles.”

When they reached the Pages’ gate, Lois’s grandmother gave a comprehensive glance at the white house with the green blinds and green front door, and the spotless brass knocker.

“Elizabeth, it would do me good to see everything belonging to you in wild chaos and confusion,” she said.

“I am doing the best I can for you in that line. Jessie Matthews is having her music lesson, so I shall have to take you straight up to your room.”

When Mrs. Luther Page came down at tea-time, she was much struck with the change in the parlor.

“How cosy the room looks with a piano in it!”

she said. "The very fact that it is such a large piano and such a small room gives a sort of rakish charm to the place; but, Elizabeth, how could you make up your mind to the innovation?"

"It is the Matthews' piano; Jessie's mother wanted her to go on with her music lessons."

"And so this is Jessie! My dear, how very large you are of your age. She is the image of her father, is n't she? I suppose your mother is as beautiful as ever?"

"Yes, she is," said Jessie. "It is a pity I don't look like her, is n't it?" and she flashed a glance at Lois's grandmother, so full of a certain quiet amusement in the situation that the elder Mrs. Page suddenly felt as if she must look after her manners, in the presence of this young critic.

Lois's grandmother had brought down a large box done up in white paper tied with a pink ribbon.

"I have a belated birthday present here for you, Lois," she said. "I brought it all the way from Paris."

Lois undid the parcel with eager fingers. Inside the box was a complete millinery establishment for dolls. There were several untrimmed hats, and there were tiny feathers and flowers and gauze scarfs to trim them with, and there were the standards to

put them on, such as there are in shops. Lois was so delighted that she could hardly speak.

Jessie, on the other hand, was loud in her exclamations.

"I hope you like it, Lois," said her grandmother.

Did she like it! Lois raised her eloquent eyes to her grandmother's face. She felt that she had never liked anything so much in her whole life.

"And who is this person?" and Mrs. Luther Page went forward to stroke the cat, who had settled herself for a nap in the deep Morris chair. "Elizabeth Page! That I should have lived to see the day that you would allow a cat in the precincts of your parlor! I adore cats. They are as sacred to me as they are to the Egyptians. What is her name?" and she turned to Lois.

"Minnie. I wrote to you about her coming to us," said Lois shyly.

"Yes, I remember now, but I never really get a person into my mind until I have been introduced to her. Minnie, I am Lois's grandmother, and so we must be good friends."

Lois's mother stooped to lift Minnie out of the Morris chair.

"Don't do that, Elizabeth. She will hate me if you do. There are plenty of chairs here. Goodness!

who is this walking in? A second cat? Oh, I see, it is only a kitten."

"It is very large of its age," said Jessie, "and it is not beautiful like its mother."

"You saucy child!" said Lois's grandmother, and from that moment she and Jessie were firm friends.

"It is a witch kitten," said Lois, who could not bear to be left out of the conversation. "Do you notice, grandmother, that it has double paws? Witch kittens are very lucky; we have had a lot of luck since it came."

"I have always wanted one of those six-toed kittens. Do you mean to keep it? Or may I have it when I go home?"

"I have been trying to get some one to take it for the last two months," said Mrs. Page. "It will be another proof of our extraordinary luck if you will take it."

CHAPTER XII

THE HOUSE WHERE NOTHING HAPPENED

Lois's grandmother had never enjoyed a visit at her daughter-in-law's so much as this one. To begin with, the witch kitten helped to cement the bond between herself and Lois; and then in the second place, there was Jessie, who stood as an interpreter, and was always ready to draw Lois out, and Lois talking was quite a different child from Lois silent, as her grandmother found. Then, too, the craze for Bridge had reached the town, and Mrs. Luther Page was never happier than when playing this game. Several Bridge parties were given in her honor, and she was asked to dinner at the Drapers', and to supper at various houses, including Sophie Brown's, where she had the pleasure of seeing Captain Taft, who had exchanged his arctics for some slippers, embroidered in dull yellow on a green background, by a niece in Dakota. Best of all, however, were the long drives that the Brierfield horses made possible, when Mrs. Page and her daughter-in-law and the children explored the neighboring country,

driving through the woods, or to the summits of distant hills.

The bright autumn coloring had gone, and the dull shades of early November had taken its place, but there was a peculiar charm in the soft haze of these Indian summer afternoons. So the time sped by, and Grandmother Lois, who had come for one week, decided to stay until the middle of November.

There were only three days of her visit left, when she was sitting one evening in the parlor, with her daughter-in-law and the children.

"This is my last quiet evening in the dear house where nothing happens," she said, as she took out her embroidery. "I wish I had n't promised to play Bridge at the Smiths' to-morrow. I dislike Mrs. Smith; she is a pert little upstart. But what could I do? The Bridge birds of a feather who flock together are sometimes a very queerly assorted set. Dear me! I have lost my needle! How tiresome!"

"I have some," said Jessie, and she took out a needle-book tied with pink ribbon.

"Mrs. Draper gave her that. It was the second prize in the darning-class," Lois explained. "Anne Morgan got the first, and I got the third because I improved so much. It is a pincushion that looks

just like an apple. Would n't you like to see it, grandmother?"

"Of course I should."

Lois brought out her pincushion and showed it with pride.

"Ellen had the fourth prize," she continued. "It was a red crocheted pincushion made to look like a tomato. Mrs. Draper gave it to her because Ellen is so fond of vegetables. We did n't know there were to be more than two prizes, and it was such a lovely surprise!"

Every one went to sleep as peacefully as usual that night, and it was a little past one o'clock before the disturbance began. They were all good sleepers, and the bell of the town hall rang noisily for some time, and yet none of them waked. Then it stopped for a while and rang again, and it was followed by the louder peal of the bell on the Methodist Church, which was very near. Grandmother Lois was the first to wake. She had a confused impression that it was the Fourth of July, then she remembered the season of the year, and listened with growing apprehension. On the sidewalk below her windows, there was the hurried tramp of many feet all going in the same direction, and the sound of voices. She could see no signs of a fire on her

side of the house, so she hastily put on her wrapper, and went into her daughter-in-law's room.

"Wake up, Elizabeth, there is a fire!" she cried.

The younger Mrs. Page roused herself slowly, and then went to the window and pushed up the curtain, and she and her mother-in-law peered out into the night. There was a dull red glow all over the southern side of the sky, and below it a building was burning and the flames were leaping up in fantastic shapes.

"It's Chauncey's, I am sure," said Mrs. Page, "and the wind is bringing the sparks over in our direction. I am sorry to frighten you, mother, but I think it would be wise for you to pack your trunk. I must call Maggie. I hope the children won't wake."

At this moment, however, Jessie was roused by voices directly under her window, and she was pushing up the curtain. "Lois, Lois!" she called. "Do wake up and come and look at this beautiful fire. It is the most glorious thing I ever saw. Just see how the sparks fly!"

Lois joined her, and the two children stood spell-bound at the window. They watched the flames leap up as if they were live things, and cover the whole building, and they could hear the shouts of the crowd. Finally one side of the store fell in, and then there

was a magnificent display of fireworks, with the accompaniment of flying sparks and hoarse cries from the crowd.

"Is n't that wonderful?" said Jessie.

"Yes, but did you see that? Our fence has caught."

They had felt no sense of personal danger before, but had watched the spectacle as if it were a superior kind of fireworks arranged for their especial benefit. "Mother, mother!" Lois called, "our fence is on fire!"

Jessie, meanwhile, was dressing quickly. "Somebody ought to go down there with buckets of water to put the fire out as soon as it catches," she said.

Lois began to dress too, and Mrs. Page came to their door. "I am sorry you waked, children. You had better go to bed again; there is n't anything you can do. I will wake you if there is any real danger."

"But the fence is on fire," said Lois.

Just then there was a loud ringing at the door, and Mrs. Page hurried down.

"Your fence is on fire," said Amyas Morgan, "and Reuben and I want some buckets of water, so we can keep guard and put it out. The whole fire department is busy down at the square."

"Is it Chauncey's that is burning?" Mrs. Page asked.

"Yes."

"I thought Joe Mills would be sure to come to protect us."

"I guess he's busy saving the kids at his house. The block next Chauncey's caught first, and the Donnellys have a tenement there. Joe discovered the fire, but it was well under way before he could give the alarm."

Mrs. Page and Maggie went to get some old fire buckets, and the boys departed, full of importance in being so useful.

Meanwhile Mrs. Luther Page was putting the clothes into her trunk with nervous haste.

The wind was blowing strongly from the south, and Elizabeth Page, who never lost her head, went about the house as calmly as if she had been accustomed to fires from her childhood, quietly collecting her valuables and packing them in the trunks that she and Maggie brought in from the store-room. Seeing her mother so occupied, Lois went into the play-room to gather up some of her treasures. She had so many that it was hard to choose, but chief of all were her doll Betty and her little mahogany bureau and bedstead, a candlestick in the form of

a griffin, the doll's hat Amyas had given her, and the beautiful millinery outfit that her grandmother had brought her. Some of these things were a little hard to carry, but Lois managed to transport them all to her mother's room, where she deposited them in a heap on the floor.

"For heaven's sake, Lois Page, what are you doing?" asked her mother, turning around as the last load was brought in.

"It is just a few of the things I care most about," said Lois. "I thought I would bring them in here to save you trouble."

Mrs. Page looked at Betty, the doll, sitting among the ruins of her home, and she could not help laughing, for Betty, even in this hour of affliction, had the same cheerful, self-satisfied expression that she always wore. She was leaning back against the bureau, with the hat Amyas had given her put on awry, and she seemed to say, "Look at me. See how well I can bear adversity!"

Jessie, meanwhile, had quietly packed her trunk, and then came in to see if she could help her Aunt Elizabeth.

"I am sure there is no real danger," said Lois's mother, "but it is well to be prepared for everything."

“Elizabeth,” called the elder Mrs. Page, “you must come and help me. I am so nervous. There are two dresses I can’t get into my trunk. Nora packed for me when I came. I don’t see how she managed so cleverly. The dresses are my black satin and my *crêpe de chine*. I got everything in, as I thought, and I had the trunk locked, and then I remembered them; they were in the back of the closet.”

Meanwhile Jessie and Lois slipped out to the cat-house to see how Minnie and Mittens were bearing the excitement. They found them walking back and forth on the window-sill. Finding that there was nothing to do for their favorites, it was not in human nature for the children to go back to the house without first joining the group at the fence.

Amyas and Reuben were keeping guard manfully; the wind was already going down, and the sparks that came over were fewer.

“Hullo, Lois,” said Amyas, “I am afraid the fire is going to fizzle out.”

“What a pity!” said Lois.

“Would you like it better if your house were to get on fire?” Reuben asked.

“No. But it is such a beautiful thing to look at, that, as long as Chauncey’s had to burn, I’d like it

to keep on a little longer. There was n't anybody hurt, was there?"

"A fireman fell and broke his leg. It was very exciting. We wanted to stay, but we noticed that your fence was on fire, so we came over," said Amyas, who always liked the credit for his kind deeds.

"That was very good of you," said Lois. She was so taken out of herself by the fire, that she forgot to be afraid of Amyas and his brother.

"I wonder if there is n't anything we can do?" said Jessie. "Do you suppose the firemen would like some hot coffee?"

"You bet!" said Amyas. "Here is one of them who would."

Jessie went back to the house to tell Mrs. Page that the wind was going down, and to ask if Maggie might not make some coffee. Lois meant to follow her, but she stood rooted to the spot, being fascinated by the spectacle of the fire.

"Mother did n't want us to wake up," she said, "but I would n't have missed this beautiful sight for anything in the world. It is my first real fire. When the steam-mill burned, it just happened we were away on a picnic. I always have the worst luck. Where's Ellen?"

"She and Anne never waked up, and mother would n't let me wake them. She said Ellen would insist on going to the fire, and she did n't want her to."

"Poor Ellen!" said Lois. It was hard to understand the grown-up point of view concerning fires. "I should think your mother would have wanted her to come. It is something she would remember to her dying day."

"They've got the fire under control now," said Amyas regretfully.

Lois had a distinct sense of disappointment.

A little later hot coffee was served in the Pages' kitchen, and groups of firemen came to the door to get it, while Grandmother Lois and Mrs. Page, Jessie, Lois, Amyas, and Reuben had a picnic lunch in the dining-room.

"I did say that I thought Chauncey's was a disgrace to the village and that it ought to burn down," said Lois's grandmother, "and I did say that nothing ever happened in your house, and that I should like to see everything you possessed in wild chaos, but, my dear Elizabeth, I never expected Fate to take me so seriously."

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRIO CLUB

WINTER came early that year, and there was a heavy snowstorm on the day when Grandmother Lois and Mittens left town. In spite of this, however, several people, besides the family, went to the station to see her off, including Sophie Brown and her father.

"Everything comes to him who waits," said Grandmother Lois, as she saw the captain coming down the street. "Captain Taft's arctics have their proper background at last."

Lois and Jessie felt very lonely after Grandmother Lois had departed with the witch kitten, and it was hard to tell which of them they missed the most. As for Minnie, she was quite unhappy for a day, and searched the house for Mittens restlessly, and then, with the philosophy of her race, she adapted herself to the inevitable. It was not long before she was consoled for her loss by the arrival of three kittens, all of them black with white breasts and paws.

"It is too bad they are all just alike," said Lois, as she and her mother and Jessie inspected the basket that held Minnie's children.

"I think it is very fortunate," said Mrs. Page, "for it will be just as well to keep only one this time, and there will be no trouble in deciding which it is to be."

"You are only going to keep one! Oh, mother!" Lois's face had a horror-stricken expression. "We must keep them all!"

"It is too hard work to find good homes for them. It will be much kinder not to try to bring them up, than to have to give them poor homes later."

"When I grow up," said Lois energetically, "I am going to keep as many cats and kittens as I like. No kitten will have to be sent away."

"I am glad it will be some years before you are grown up," said her mother. "Now, children, to me these kittens are as alike as three peas in a pod, but you may choose the one you would rather keep, if you have a preference."

A closer inspection showed that each one had an individual charm.

"This one is a little beauty," said Jessie. "See, it has a pink nose, and a white line that runs up the face."

"But it has not half as pretty feet as this darling thing," said Lois, picking up a scrap of a kitten. "Now that kitten you have, Jessie, has white shoes on in front and white stockings behind, while this has four white shoes."

"All right, we'll save that one."

"It would be a wicked shame not to keep this little fellow," said Lois, taking up the third kitten. "He is bigger than any of the rest, and his coat is such a glossy black, and he has such pretty white stockings behind and white shoes in front; he and the pink-nosed one would make a fascinating pair. Oh, mother, why can't we keep them all? Three is such a small number. There were five kittens at Hollisford."

"But we have not as much room for them here."

"Mother, it seems as if there were enough sad things in life that had to be," said Lois, "without making such unhappiness for Minnie and Jessie and me. I will promise to find good homes for them all, if you will only let them live."

"Well, dear, I tell you what I will do. I will give you until the end of the week, and if you can have suitable homes engaged for them by that time, I will let you keep them all."

Lois and Jessie were delighted with this decision,

and they immediately began to rack their brains, to consider where they could place Minnie's children to the best advantage.

"I wonder if Mrs. Draper would take one," said Lois. "She is very kind-hearted, and she only has Gem. Let's go round and ask her."

But, tender-hearted as Mrs. Draper was, she had the same extraordinary point of view concerning cats that seemed to be shared by most grown people, namely, that one cat is enough for one household.

"Perhaps Mrs. Donnelly will take one," Mrs. Draper suggested. "Although they are so poor, they are very kind to animals, and they lost their cat at the time of the fire."

And so the children went around to the forlorn, bare rooms that were the temporary home of Mrs. Donnelly and her son Joe Mills, and her six Donnelly children.

The little girls went up three flights of narrow, dark stairs, nearly running into the refrigerator in the entry, and knocked on Mrs. Donnelly's door.

She opened it a crack and peered out to see who was there, and when she found it was only Jessie and Lois, she flung the door open hospitably. "Come right in, children. I thought you was the insurance man, and I did not have anything for him this week.

Evelina," to a small child who was sitting on the floor, "get up and come to speak to these little girls, and you stop making such a racket, George Thomas. Excuse the wash-tub being in the middle of the room ; it rained so hard the first of the week, I did n't get round to my washing."

Meanwhile, Jessie was taking in every detail of the poor little room, and with her usual desire to help, she was wondering what she could do to make them a little more comfortable. She quickly decided that this would not be a happy home for one of the black pussies, and was wondering what excuse she could give for the call.

"We have come to see if you would like to engage a kitten," said Lois, who had waited for Jessie to speak first. "We heard you lost yours."

"I don't want the bother of any more cats. There's altogether too many of them round here now. My! the cat-concerts that go on in the alley back of us! George Thomas, I told you not to touch the molasses. You are a bad boy. I shall have to whip you. Beulah! you just let the table alone."

Jessie and Lois sadly left the Donnelly mansion, feeling that one more dream had failed to come true. On the way home they stopped at the grocery store

to ask the grocer to let them know if he heard of any one, on his rounds, who wanted a kitten, but he was very discouraging. "We have two kittens here in the store we want to find homes for," he said.

In recess at school, the next day, Lois asked first one child and then another if she wanted a kitten.

"You can never think of but one thing at a time, Lois Page," said Ethel Smith. "I'm sick to death of hearing about your cat and her kittens."

"Did you say you had a kitten to dispose of?" Miss Benton asked. "We want one very much; I have been trying to find a black one, but I will take anything I can get, as I don't want to wait much longer."

"These are black," said Lois eagerly, "only they have some white on them; white breasts and paws, and white spots on their faces. Will that make any difference?"

"No; I suppose they will catch mice just as well."

Lois and Jessie were in a very happy frame of mind, as they went home from school. To have so successfully found a home for one of their protégées gave them new courage.

In the afternoon, Miss Greenleaf, Jessie's music-teacher, came to give her a lesson, and was taken out to inspect the kittens. Miss Greenleaf was young,

with a round face and figure, and large eyes that looked almost like those of a child. She was very much fascinated by the kittens. "I must have one," she said. "Why, they are exactly alike, are n't they? You will have to call them the Trio Club, and I will give them musical names. This little thing with the pink nose seems very full of life; we'll call her Presto, and the big one can be Andantino, and the middle-sized one Allegro. The darling things! I will engage Presto; she is the prettiest."

After that, Lois felt happier. To break into a little company dignified by such a name as the Trio Club, and ruthlessly to destroy a creature called Andantino or Allegro, seemed too hard-hearted a thing for her mother to do.

And yet Lois still had a somewhat insecure feeling, and so she continued to bore every one she met by saying, "I don't suppose you happen to want a young kitten, do you? A black one with the dearest white paws? We have three of them, and we call them the Trio Club."

Finally, at the end of the week, Lois had to go to the dentist to have a tooth filled. She dreaded it very much, and the fact that both her mother and Jessie went with her gave her but little comfort. As Lois sat waiting in the outer room until the last

patient should leave, she thought how much she was going to be hurt, and how hard it was that holes came in teeth. There were many things about the arrangement of the world that Lois could not understand.

She picked up a magazine that lay on the table and began to turn the leaves. It was a magazine with pictures in it, and some of them were very pretty, but they failed to distract her mind. Then she looked out of the window at the men and women who were passing. Did they all have fillings in their teeth? Finally, the other patient went out and the awful moment came when Lois mounted the dentist's chair. After all, it did not really hurt her much to have the tooth filled. It was expecting all the time that she was going to be hurt that was the worst part.

"You have very good teeth," said the dentist, as he polished off the filling. He had such a kind expression that a sudden idea seized Lois.

"We have three black kittens at home," she said; "they are almost exactly alike, so we call them the Trio Club, but mother does not want us to keep any, unless we have homes engaged for them all. You don't happen to want a young kitten, do you?"

"That is exactly what I do want," said the dentist.



THE TRIO CLUB

CHAPTER XIV

A WINTER PICNIC

Lois had always liked summer better than winter, but this year she changed her mind, and thought that nothing could be quite so good as these December days, when the crisp air sent the blood tingling through her veins. The white world, with the dark trees powdered with snow, and in the late afternoons the blood-red sunsets warm and glowing against the cold white, had an especial charm. And into this world, as beautiful as fairy-land, Lois walked hand in hand with Jessie and Ellen; while coasting, sleigh-riding, and skating made a sort of carnival of each day. Now that her fear of the Morgan boys had been cured, there was an added interest in having them of the party. Lois could skate well enough to join the others, and Amyas and Reuben often took her and Jessie, with their sisters, on coasting-parties. Lois had never known before the joys of the "double-runner," and although she felt she took her life in her hands every time she went down a steep hill, there was a fearful pleasure in the descent, and a

thankfulness and surprise each time she reached the bottom safely, that made coasting a pastime of which she never tired.

"I think," said Jessie, one morning, "that we ought to do something for those poor Donnellys at Christmas. I wish we could have a Christmas tree for them. Could n't we, Aunt Elizabeth?"

"It would be a great amount of work," said Mrs. Page, "and I know that a good deal has been done for the Donnellys already. We have been making some clothes for them in the sewing-circle."

"I did n't mean clothes," said Jessie; "and we'll do all the work if you will only let us have the tree. There are plenty of hemlocks at Brierfield; I am sure Garrett would cut one down for us. I can see just the way it would look," she went on eagerly. "We can get a lot of candles, and make lovely decorations out of gold and silver paper, and for very little money we can buy some toys, and the candy can be put in colored candy-horns, which we can make ourselves. There are six Donnellys, four girls and two boys, and their rooms are so forlorn! and we could have the tree in the play-room, where it would not trouble any one, except the Trio Club, and they could be put into the laundry for once. Oh,

please, Aunt Elizabeth, may n't we have it, if we'll promise to do all the work, and pay for it ourselves?"

"Oh, mother, dear, it would be so lovely!" said Lois. "I never had a Christmas tree."

"You never had a Christmas tree!" Jessie exclaimed. "Why, you poor darling, that seems terrible! I'll have to put something on the tree for you."

Mrs. Page had learned by experience that Jessie's ideas were practical ones, and after a little more debating she said that they could have the Christmas tree. Anne and Ellen were asked to join in the scheme, and the children had a secret session one stormy afternoon in the attic at the top of the Morgans' house. It was a delightful place, with a large table and a tool-chest, and plenty of room to work or play.

"Hullo," said Amyas, coming in to get some tools, "what are you four up to?"

"It is a secret," said Ellen solemnly, "and no one is to know anything about it."

"What a lot of money you've got!" he said, looking into Ellen's lap, where the contents of her bank were gathered together in a heap.

"It is n't so much as it looks. It's mostly coppers," said Ellen in dejected tones. "I thought there would be a lot more. I have n't got all the presents

for the family yet, so I am afraid I can only spare fifteen cents, but Lois is going to give twenty-five and Anne twenty-five, and Jessie a dollar; that makes a dollar and sixty-five cents. Don't you want to give us some money, Amyas?" she added in her sweetest tones. "It is for a perfectly fine cause."

"No, I thank you. I don't go it blind. If you want any money, you've got to tell me what it's for."

"Why not tell him?" said Anne. "You tell him, Jessie; it is your idea."

Amyas was far more interested in the plan than they had dared to hope. He not only promised them fifty cents, but, what was far better, he proposed that he and Reuben should go over to Brierfield with them to get the tree. "We'll go on the Saturday before Christmas," he decided, "and we'll have a regular spree. We'll start in the morning, and we'll take the double-runner, and when we come to Morse's hill we'll coast down it, and we'll steal one or two rides behind carts, so it won't be too long a walk. We'll have luncheon out of doors, and then cut the tree down and bring it home on the sled."

The four girls were greatly thrilled by this exciting programme.

"Oh dear, I'm so afraid mother won't let me go!" said Lois.

"Oh, she 'll have to ! I 'll make her let you," said Amyas.

Mrs. Page did not altogether approve of the scheme. She was afraid it would be too much for Lois, and she was sure that some of them would take cold eating out of doors. She weakened after a time, for they were so bitterly disappointed, and finally said they might go, if they would have their luncheon in the house at Brierfield, and take some older person with them. Susan Morgan cheerfully consented to be the older person.

Lois was sure it was going to storm on the Saturday before Christmas. She worked herself up into a fever of anxiety.

"I know it will snow ! It is just my luck."

"And I am sure it will be pleasant ; it is just my luck," said Jessie. "Why not think it is going to be pleasant, and then you will be sure to have that much fun out of it?"

Lois waked early the Saturday before Christmas, and she went to the window and pushed up the curtain. It was not light yet, but there was a dull streak of red in the east.

"Wake up, Jessie, wake up !" she cried, "it is going to be a pleasant day."

"It seems almost too cold to go," said Mrs. Page,

after breakfast, as she looked at the thermometer; "it is only nine above zero, and there is a wind."

"But, mother, you will let us go," begged Lois.

"Of course, dear, if the others go, but I am afraid you will not get very much pleasure out of it."

Not get very much pleasure out of it! Jessie and Lois expected to enjoy the day as they had never enjoyed anything in their whole lives!

At ten o'clock the Morgans appeared, — such a merry, lively company in their gay tam-o'-shanters and sweaters, that Mrs. Page changed her mind, and decided that they were going to have a good time in spite of the weather.

"Poor mother," said Lois, "I hope you won't be lonely. I wish you were coming too."

"Do come along, Mrs. Page," Amyas said; "you can get on the double-runner whenever you are tired."

But Mrs. Page was very busy over some Christmas presents, and she was glad to have a quiet day to herself.

Every one they passed, as they went along the village street, glanced at the children with interest.

"We look as if we were going coasting," said

Ellen. "No one will imagine what else we are going to do."

The first person to speak to them was Captain Taft. "Going coasting?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, I should say there was too cold a wind, but young folks don't mind. I suppose I would n't have minded myself, once."

And the next was Mrs. Robertson. "Are you going coasting?" she inquired in disapproving tones. "It is much too cold. I would n't let Dora go."

And the third was Joel Carpenter. "Are you going coasting?" he said joyfully. "I'll come along too."

They were not particularly anxious to have him share their secret, but they did not know how to get rid of him, and so he joined them.

They had a glorious coast down Morse's hill. Lois was on the forward sled, and it was very exciting to fly past the vanishing trees and then sweep around the curve near the bottom. She had certainly thought they would tip over that time. Presently there came along an empty cart bound for the woods.

"Let's steal a ride," whispered Amyas. He hitched the sled on behind, and they all got on

silently with stealthy tread like conspirators. A little later the driver turned his head.

“Good-morning,” he said genially. “Won’t you all get into my cart?”

His cordiality was something of a shock, and took the zest out of the stolen ride.

The lunch at Brierfield was one of the pleasantest parts of the day, for some huge logs were burning in the hall fireplace, and they all sat in a semi-circle around the cheerful blaze. Susan and Jessie unpacked the lunch, and they had a merry meal. If it was not quite so romantic eating their sandwiches and cake before the fire as it would have been under the pine-trees, it was certainly more comfortable.

Best of all was the walk in the afternoon and the choosing a hemlock-tree. It was very cold and still in the woods, and the snow was as white as if it had fallen that very day. The mayflowers were hidden now, and the birches and maples lifted bare branches to the sky. Everything was different from what it had been on the April day when Lois was so glad that icy winter was far away, except the pines and hemlocks, that were as green as if they had forgotten it was not spring. A red-headed woodpecker, that had perched on a neigh-

boring branch, flew away at their approach into the heart of the woods.

“Oh, how beautiful it is!” said Lois. “What a pity that everybody can’t have such a good time!”

“Every one can have out of doors if they want it,” said Jessie.

“Amyas, do see what a nice tree this is! Let’s cut this one down,” said Ellen.

“What, that scrubby thing?” Reuben asked. “That’s too lop-sided.”

“Let’s each choose a tree,” said Anne, and they scattered like a covey of birds.

Lois and Jessie kept together, and they found a tree, almost perfect in its symmetry, tall and yet not too tall. The moment they saw it they felt it must be *the* tree. Even Ellen was forced to acknowledge the wisdom of their choice, and the boys soon felled it and strapped it to the double-runner.

The journey back in the afternoon was not so delightful as the morning trip.

“I wish that hills could be tipped the other way, like a teeter,” said Ellen, when they came to Morse’s hill. “It is perfectly horrid to have that long, steep climb.”

Lois was beginning to feel very tired, but she tried to look as if she liked to climb hills.

"You are tired out, Lois," said Susan Morgan kindly.

"I'm not much tired."

Reuben began untying the tree.

"What are you doing?" Amyas asked. "The tree is all right."

"I am going to carry it awhile," said Reuben, "and then Lois and Jessie can get on the sled, and you and Joel can pull them up the hill."

"I am not a bit tired," said Jessie, and she looked so fresh that Lois felt ashamed to have given out.

"I'd like to ride," said Ellen.

Reuben gave a scornful laugh. "You? You are as well able to pull Amyas up the hill as he is to pull you. You're just lazy."

"Why isn't Lois lazy?"

"She is tired."

"I am sorry to give you so much trouble," said Lois, as she got on the sled. She wondered why the boys were so good to her, when in their heart of hearts they must think her so poor-spirited to get tired. She wished she were as strong as Jessie and Ellen.

"We had a splendid time, mother," said Lois, when they reached home.

"It was great," said Jessie.

"I had a successful day, too," said Mrs. Page. "I got Grandmother Lois's Christmas box packed, and I finished your present and Jessie's."

"How exciting that sounds, mother! I wish we knew what they were."

CHAPTER XV

THE CHRISTMAS TREE

"OH, mother dear, you can't come in just yet," Lois said; "we don't want you to see the tree until it is entirely ready."

Jessie, having promised that they would do all the work themselves, was carrying out her agreement to the letter, and Mrs. Page, who wanted to help them, had to be contented merely to give advice. There had been many secret sessions in the play-room and in the Morgans' attic, and Jessie and Lois had taken several trips to the village store. They had just come in from a final one now.

"Your money seems to have held out like the widow's cruse of oil," said Mrs. Page.

"Why, yes, mother. We thought we had spent it all, and we wanted to get some more animals, and Reuben gave us twenty cents, and then Joel Carpenter gave us a quarter, and then Reuben did not like to have Joel give more than he did, when Joel was n't in the secret to begin with, so Reuben gave ten cents more, and then Joel gave ten, and then

Reuben gave another ten. It was as exciting as an auction. Reuben had to borrow of Amyas, and Amyas wouldn't lend him more than ten cents, so Reuben had to drop out because he was 'dead broke,' he said, and Joel came out five cents ahead of him. I think it was too bad, for he was n't half so interested in the tree as Reuben was."

"But it was nice to get the extra five cents," said Jessie.

Just before the guests came, Mrs. Page slipped into the play-room, unseen by Lois and Jessie, and tied six pairs of mittens, and three red tam-o'-shanters and three blue ones, to the tree. She also decorated the branches with two pink and two scarlet flannel petticoats, and some socks. After this she tied on thirteen costume crackers. Then she quietly slipped out of the room.

The Donnellys were so afraid of being late that they arrived half an hour too early. This was a little inconvenient, for Jessie and Lois were dressing.

Maggie knocked on their door and said, "Your company has come. They are waiting in the entry."

"Dear me, what shall we do!" said Lois. "Do you mind if they stay in the kitchen, Maggie, until we come down?"

"It would hurt their feelings and make them

think they had come too early," said Jessie. "Aunt Elizabeth," she called out, "would you mind talking to the Donnellys until we are ready? Please say how ashamed we are to be so late. Perhaps they would like to go down to the laundry and see Minnie and the Trio Club."

And so it happened that Mrs. Page headed a procession of six Donnellys, all painfully shy and all dressed in their best clothes, and took them down to the temporary dwelling-place of the Trio Club.

The ice was soon broken, for no one could long feel any stiffness in the presence of these engaging animals.

Each Donnelly made a dive for a kitten. George Thomas secured one, Beulah was the happy possessor of a second, while Michael and Evelina chased Presto around the room, and Michael finally got her, much to Evelina's disappointment. Miriam Donnelly had taken Minnie in her arms, while May Lilian walked around the room, stroking each kitten in turn.

"What is this one's name?" she asked shyly.

"That is Minnie. That is the mother cat."

"My! but she looks like a kitten herself!" said May Lilian.

"Yes, she is a small cat."

"And what is this one's name?"

"Allegro."

"What a funny name!"

"I did n't name her," said Mrs. Page. "If I had, I should have given her a good sensible name."

"And what is mine called?" asked George Thomas.

"Andantino."

"I guess you did n't name that one either," said Michael, with a grin.

"We are ready now," Jessie called down.

The other guests had come, and they were all taken upstairs, and the door of the play-room was flung open.

The Morgans and Jessie and Joel Carpenter had seen other Christmas trees that were more elaborate, while to Lois and the Donnellys, who only knew Sunday-school and school Christmas trees, there was an especial charm about this one because it was their very own. The four Donnelly girls sat in a row on the sofa, with their feet stuck out primly in front of them. They looked very grave, as if it would be quite improper to smile. Miriam, who was the oldest, kept them in excellent order. Michael and George Thomas politely stood until Mrs. Page asked them to be seated.

Jessie and Lois gave a cry of pleasure when they saw the petticoats and tam-o'-shanters. "How perfectly splendid, Aunt Elizabeth!" Jessie said.

The tree was a pretty sight, for it had many candles on it, and the little points of light were very brilliant against the background of green. Everything meant some happy recollection to Lois: the tree reminded her of that beautiful walk in the woods, and the candy-horns made her think of a delightful snowy afternoon in the Morgans' attic, when she and Jessie and the Morgans sat around the table with paste and scissors and colored paper. She was so awkward, and Anne and Amyas were so kind in helping her! And the candles and the animals! Would she ever forget that trip to the village store, when Amyas came in unexpectedly and made the clerk take ten cents off the whole amount, because they had bought so many things? There was a second trip and a third, and still another, each with some pleasant memory quite distinct from all the rest. And it was dear Jessie who had made it possible. Without her they would not have had a Christmas tree.

The Donnelly's were delighted with their presents; even Miriam's face relaxed when she was given a blue hair ribbon and a pretty handker-

chief with an M in one corner. George Thomas was much pleased with a teeter with a yellow chicken on either end. His eyes were glued to this toy. "First it goes down, and then it goes up, and when one chicken is up, the other is down," said George Thomas.

The costume crackers were a delightful surprise, and Mrs. Page told the children they might dress up in the contents before they had their simple refreshments. George Thomas's costume cracker contained a pink sun-bonnet, in which he courageously arrayed himself, while Beulah wore a soldier's cap, and Lois put on a helmet, and Ellen donned a fool's cap.

"I am sorry we can only have lemonade and Uneeda biscuit and ginger-snaps," said Lois, as Maggie came in with a tray; "our money did not hold out for everything."

"It is a pretty good kind of Uneeda biscuit," said Michael, who had at last found courage to speak. He had just put on a blue and yellow toque, and every one seemed so amused by the effect that he felt that, in spite of Miriam, it was the proper thing to smile.

Some fairy wand seemed to have changed the Uneeda biscuit into Maggie's delicate orange cake

and chocolate cake, and presently, in addition to the lemonade, there came in some raspberry sherbet and macaroon ice-cream.

The children's eyes shone, and George Thomas finally put down his teeter.

"First it goes up, and then it goes down," he said dreamily, "and when one chicken is — my! what lovely pink and white ice-cream!"

"You may put your presents on the table," said Mrs. Page to the Donnellys, "and then you will have room for your plates."

The four Donnelly girls rose and carried their treasures across the room, and the boys followed their example.

"Nobody must touch my teeter," said George Thomas.

The presents cost very little, but there were a good many of them, for each Donnelly had a pencil and a block of paper, and the girls had sheets of colored tissue paper, and bags of beads, while each of the smaller children had a toy animal, and the older ones were given games and books that had once belonged to the Morgans.

After the cake and ice-cream had been eaten, there came the great surprise of the evening, for Jessie had a small present ready for each of the

Morgans and Joel Carpenter and Lois, as well as another trifle for each Donnelly.

Lois's was a small, flat parcel tied with a pink ribbon.

"How perfectly lovely!" she said, as she gazed at the contents of the package. "What a beautiful expression she has!"

"Is it a photograph of your mother?" asked Amyas.

"No, it's my cat. Such a dear picture of Minnie in her basket! I wish I had a picture of the Trio Club, too."

Then to her joy she discovered that there were two mounted photographs, and lifting the upper one, she saw underneath the three black faces of the Trio Club standing out in bold relief against the light basket. "Oh, the darling things!" she exclaimed. "That is Andantino, I am sure, but I can't tell Presto and Allegro apart. I wish I could have had a picture of their legs, but you can't expect everything."

"My goodness! I should say you couldn't," said Amyas. "Jessie got me to take their pictures, and the way they skipped around was a caution. Just as I thought I had them fixed, one would scramble out of the basket and scoot off to its mother. And the

mother was a terror. Twice I thought I had got her, when she opened her mouth and yelled. She's enough to spoil any picture. The next time Jessie asks me to take the photograph of a cat, I am going to break my leg, or go out of town."

The Morgans and Joel Carpenter went early, as they were going home to their own Christmas trees, and the Donnellys looked at one another irresolutely. Miriam was equally afraid of leaving too soon and staying too late.

"You haven't got to go yet," said Jessie. "It is so early."

"I don't know as there is any great hurry," said Miriam.

"Mother said we might stay until half-past seven if you seemed to expect us to," said George Thomas.

"Well, children, it was a great success," Mrs. Page said to Jessie and Lois, as the last Donnelly closed the front door behind him, "and certainly no children could have better manners than those Donnellys. You must feel very tired, Jessie dear. Here is a foreign letter for you; it came in the five o'clock mail."

A Christmas letter from her mother! Jessie gave a little cry of delight as she opened it. There were

two foreign postal-cards inside ; one was the charming picture of an Angora cat, for Lois, the other, which was for Jessie, was a group of three children standing with their arms around one another.

“It is like you and Ellen and me,” said Lois.

Jessie read her letter through eagerly. She glanced up with an expression of rapturous delight.

“They are coming earlier than I expected them,” she said. “Father is so much better, and has his heart so set on getting home, that the doctor says they may sail in January. Oh, Aunt Elizabeth ! It seems too good to be true !”

The tears came into Lois’s eyes. The months had been long as they passed, but as she looked back, it seemed only a short time since that April afternoon when her dear borrowed sister had alighted at the gate, and she had gone so eagerly to meet her, and had found the tears in Jessie’s eyes. Now it was Jessie who was happy and she who was sad. It was just like George Thomas’s teeter.

Jessie saw that Lois was crying. “You darling child, what is the matter ?” she asked.

“I am thinking of the time when you will be going away. It has all been so lovely, everything from the very first minute. And it will be over so soon, and you won’t be my sister any more.”

“It is n’t as if I were going far. We shall see each other every day; and you will be coming to spend a night with me every week, and I shall spend a night with you. We shall always be like sisters. If you once have a sister, you can’t lose her,” said Jessie.

PROPERTY OF
~~DIST. 56, MURRAY CO.~~

~~SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 56~~
~~LAKE WILSON, MINN.~~

PROPERTY OF
DIST. 56, MURRAY CO.

